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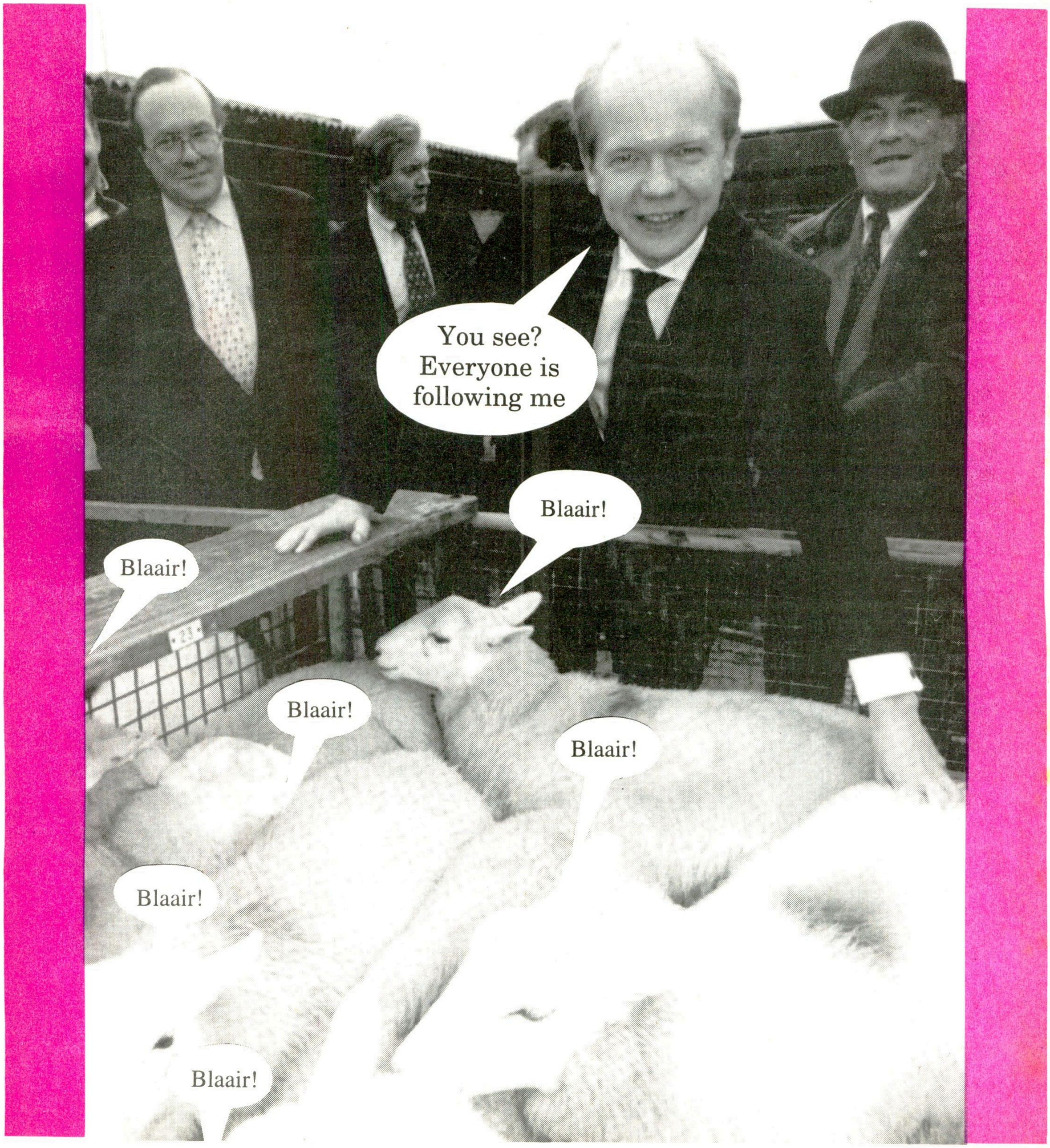

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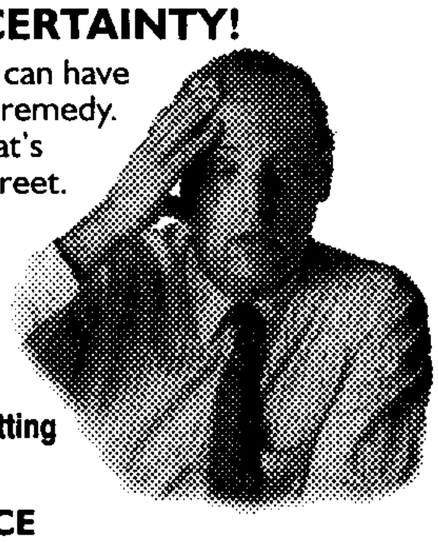

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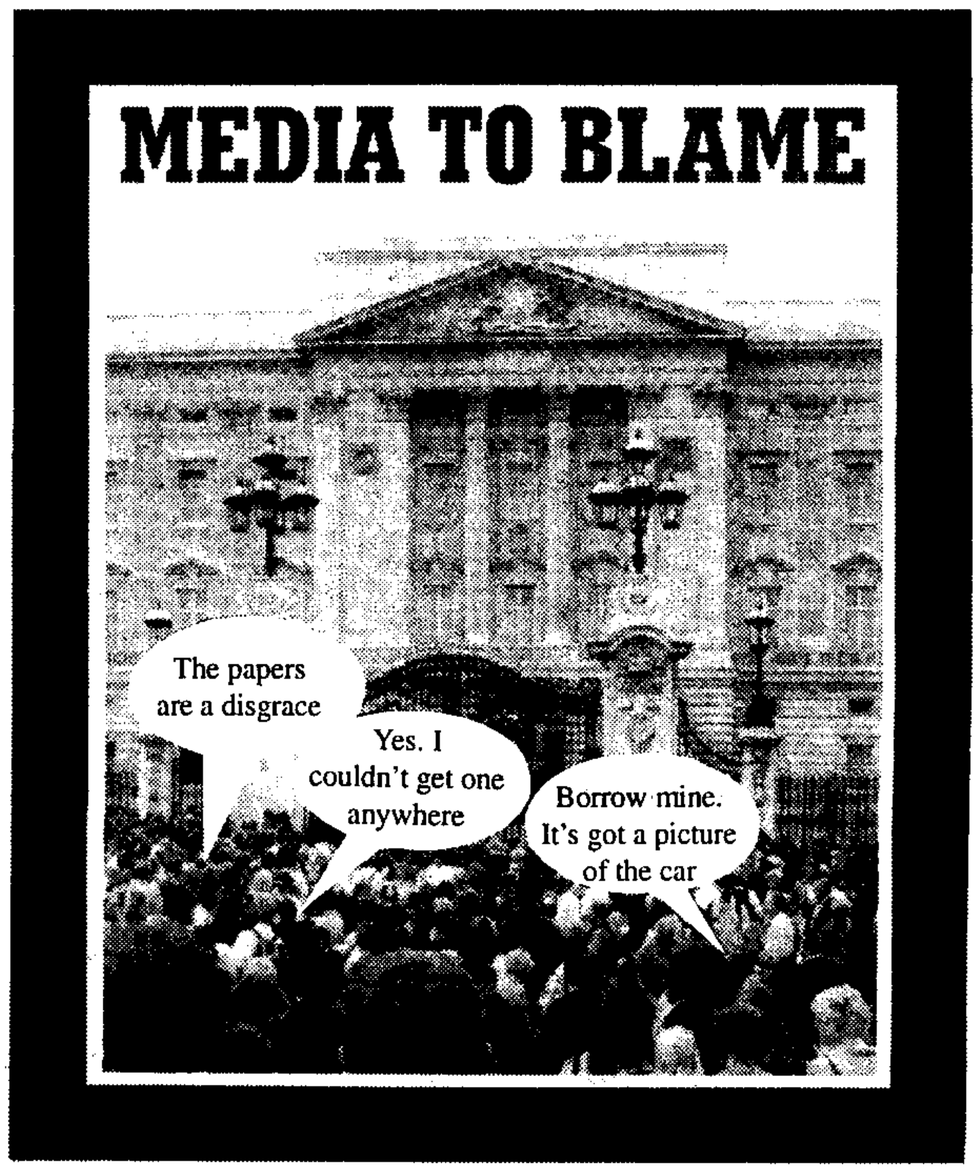

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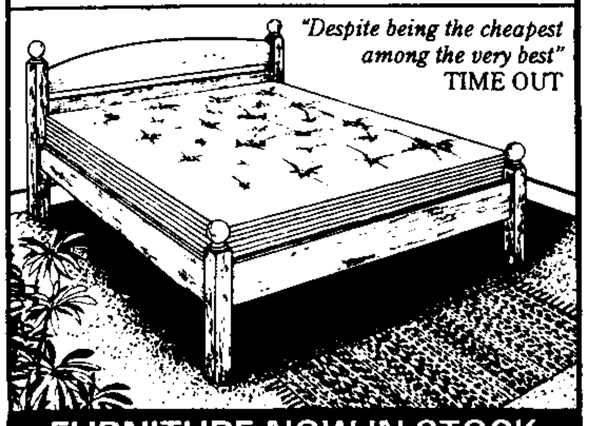

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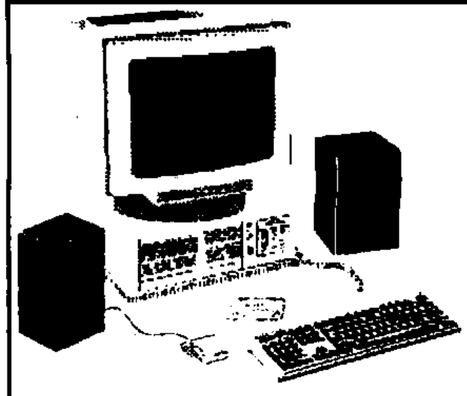

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APOLOGY
From The Conservative Party

IN the last 18 years, not to mention the last 800, we in the Conservative Party may have inadvertently given the impression that we were in some way in favour of stringing up the following:

- **Blacks**
- **Gays**
- **Foreigners**
- **Single Mothers**
- **The Unemployed**
- **Members of the Labour Party**
- **Blacks**
- **Anyone else who was not one of us.**

This unfortunate public perception of the Conservative Party in no way accorded with the facts but may have been assisted by the misinterpretation of conference speeches by leading figures urging Conservatives to string up the following:

- **Gay Foreigners**
- **Unemployed Blacks**
- **Guardian Readers**
- **Pinko Single Mothers**
- **Etc**

We would now like to make it clear that the Conservative Party has always been the party of tolerance, compassion and caring towards those not privileged enough to be white, heterosexual members of the Conservative Party who read the Telegraph.

We would also like to stress that any member of the party that does not share these beliefs is an unreconstructed dinosaur who should be strung up as soon as we can get capital punishment reintroduced.

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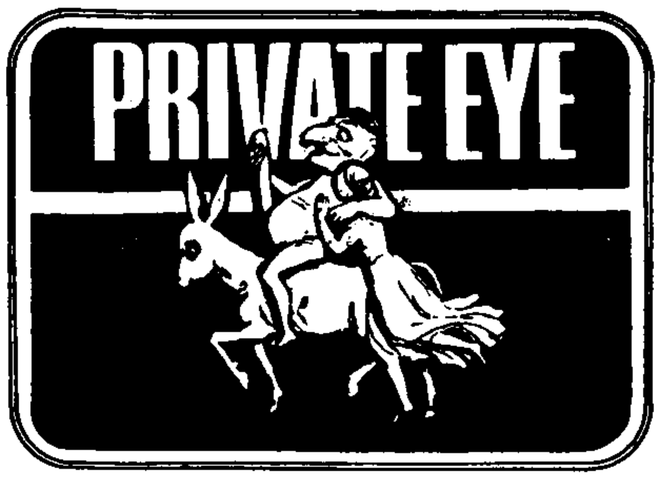

COLOUR SECTION

THERE is an intriguing history to the rather testy remarks of Dr John Burton, coroner to the royal household, to the effect that an inquest into the death of the Princess of Wales would be a waste of time.

Dr Burton was secretary to the coroners' society in the early 1980s when former Leeds policeman Ron Smith embarked on his long campaign to find the truth about the mysterious death of his daughter Helen in a street in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Smith demanded an inquest. He was bitterly opposed by John Burton who said again and again that inquests on deaths abroad would put coroners in an impossible position because they could not find the evidence.

Burton and his society gave strong support to Leeds coroner Philip Gill who initially refused an inquest into Helen Smith's death. The coroners' view was upheld at the divisional court but overthrown by Lord Chief Justice Lane at the court of appeal, which decreed that anyone who brought a dead body back from abroad was entitled to an inquest.

The Helen Smith inquest was eventually held over three weeks in November and December 1982. All sorts of witnesses appeared from all over the world, and the jury heard enough to reject the foreign office view that Helen's death was an accident. They returned an open verdict. Since then many inquests on bodies brought from abroad have comforted the families of dead people with facts and reports about their deaths.

THE haunting name of Tory groupie Anthony Gilberthorpe has cropped up again in the ongoing saga of the life and loves of Piers Merchant, privacy-loving Tory MP for Beckenham.

It was, apparently, at Gilberthorpe's flat in York that Merchant recently dallied again with the lovely Anna Cox, 17, while his fellow Tory MPs were at the party conference in Blackpool.

But "Gilby" and Merchant go way back. The former was a researcher for the latter when Merchant was MP for Newcastle Central in the mid-1980s. And as *Eye* readers will recall, Merchant was on hand to help Gilberthorpe in the lengthy and awkward libel action he launched in 1988 against three newspapers — who printed what he had told them.

That case revolved around a telephone call made from a Kensington hotel to a news agency in Gloucester. The journalist who took the call, Mark Mitchell, reported that Gilberthorpe, who was then a Gloucestershire county councillor, said he wanted to refute a story about to be published in a national newspaper that he was to be treated for AIDS in a New York clinic.

Mitchell's agency duly circulated the denial, which was published in the *Gloucester Citizen*, the *Mirror* and the *Sun*. But Gilberthorpe then sued all three claiming the journalist had asked him out of the blue if he had AIDS and had recklessly printed the denial. Piers Merchant told the court he had been in the same hotel room as Gilberthorpe when the crucial phone call was made. He had drawn his chair up close to Gilberthorpe's and had heard the conversation just as "Gilby" had reported it. The jury clearly believed this and awarded Gilby £50,000 damages. But then the newspapers dug up a lot of embarrassing information about Gilby's sex life and appealed. The appeal court ordered a trial, which never happened. The case was finally settled. Gilby got no damages and had to pay the vast majority of his costs.

PS: In September 1987, Gilberthorpe put an ad in the *Times* to announce his engagement to an American heiress called Leah Bergdorf. He later confessed he was, er, not engaged, and that Ms Bergdorf did not exist. He had apparently been carried away by vicarious enthusiasm when he heard that his hero Mark Thatcher had married an American heiress called Burgdorf.

THE Waterhouse inquiry into child abuse in north Wales has now reached a stage of high farce.

As the *Eye* has constantly pointed out, the national media are showing little or no interest in the hearings because of the anonymity rule arbitrarily laid down by the tribunal chairman, Sir Ronald Waterhouse. Anyone even remotely accused of abuse by any of the witnesses is afforded anonymity. Though names are bandied about in court, they cannot be published.

Originally Waterhouse agreed that the names of convicted paedophiles could be published. But when a man convicted of specially nasty paedophile offences appeared recently for a long stint in the box, he whined that he had received death threats and was duly allowed to keep his name secret. The man gave the court the names of a peer and his son who had, he alleged, sought to influence his evidence in a court case. The peer and son appeared in the press only as "prominent people". Both were given anonymity by Waterhouse *even though both are dead*.

One name not protected at the tribunal, however, is that of Alison Taylor, the former social worker who started making complaints about serial child abuse in north Wales homes more than 10 years ago and was systematically cold-shouldered. At the start of the inquiry, Mrs Taylor was named and criticised in the most inaccurate manner by counsel for the north Wales police, Andrew Moran. For more of her story, see Footnotes on page 27.

"I need the brightest but I give you this assurance: that merit is the only bar to getting into the Foreign Office and getting promoted in the Foreign Office. I

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"I used to be Scary Spice – but now I'm Compassionate, Tolerant and Caring Spice"

Street of Shame

AFTER Princess Diana's death the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* did a lot of holier-than-thou posturing about their dislike for intrusive photos.

Sir David English claimed — quite untruthfully — that the *Mail* never carried such pictures; while Charles Moore insisted that only the *Telegraph* was unsullied.

The first test of their new purity came on Sunday 5 October when young Jason Fraser offered editors several blurred, telephoto-lens photographs of Dr James Colthurst, the man named as Andrew Morton's go-between with Princess Diana. Jason Fraser is probably the most notorious (and richest) paparazzo in Britain: it was he who sold those grainy shots of Di and Dodi kissing, shortly before the princess's death.

Given their well-advertised disgust for paparazzi, did the *Mail* and *Telegraph* send him packing? Er, no. On Monday 6 October both papers carried no fewer than three of Fraser's photographs.

Welcome back to the gutter, chaps.

THE *fatwa* on *paparazzi* snaps of the royals (and their mistresses) will be comprehensively broken soon, the first "victim" widely predicted to be Camilla Parker Bowles.

Shortly after Diana's funeral a photographer was spotted in a tree in the grounds of her Wiltshire home. Camilla was pictured wandering alone in the garden dressed in jeans and a blue shirt and wearing — poignantly for a weekday mid-morning — the gold bracelet Brian gave her for her birthday. As yet no paper has dared print any of the snatched pictures.

The photographer was also able to snap the life-size replica of a Siberian tiger that lurks half-way down her drive, and has offered these pictures to various papers (including the *Mail on Sunday*), so far unsuccessfully. But hacks predict open season will be declared on Camilla as soon as she starts hunting.

WHITHER the career of *Daily Mail* royal hack Richard Kay, former confidant of the Princess of Wales, whose front page "exclusives" were often taken down at dictation speed from Diana herself?

Sadly it appears Kay is now desperately trying to escape from the wretched *Mail*, which is not treating him terribly royally now he has served his purpose.

Moreover, the ungrateful Lord Rothermere must be paying him a slave's wage: Kay is notorious for putting his hand in his pocket only rarely. In his emotional outpourings the day after Diana's death, he recalled the time in a London cafe when she paid £2 for their coffees. The hack couldn't even pay for a Nescafe for his best (and only) contact.

RUPERT MURDOCH's return to Britain for the Labour conference was bad news for *Sun* editor Stuart Higgins.

In a major monstering, Rupert informed the trembling Higgy that "today's paper is shit and Friday's paper was bigger shit". He is particularly annoyed by the increasingly filthy puns employed by *Sun* sports sub-editors (eg "Swollen Dicks Out", above a story about the injured footballer Julian Dicks) and claims that the paper "has become misogynist".

Become? Since when has the *Sun* been anything else?

PAST and present victims of Bridget "Death" Rowe's reign of terror at the *Sunday Mirror* are feeling a bit miffed with their former acting editor Paul Connew. Apparently he has accepted a healthy six-figure sum, plus share options, to settle a high court action over his sacking and to keep mum about his dealings with Rowe.

Connew was fired last year for the heinous offence of leading his front page with the revelation that two of Britain's biggest drug dealers had been secretly released by Michael Howard. Rowe didn't rate the story and publicly branded Connew an "idiot". She then looked pretty idiotic herself over the next few days, as the "non-story" led the BBC and ITN news and half a dozen national newspapers — including the *Daily Mirror*.

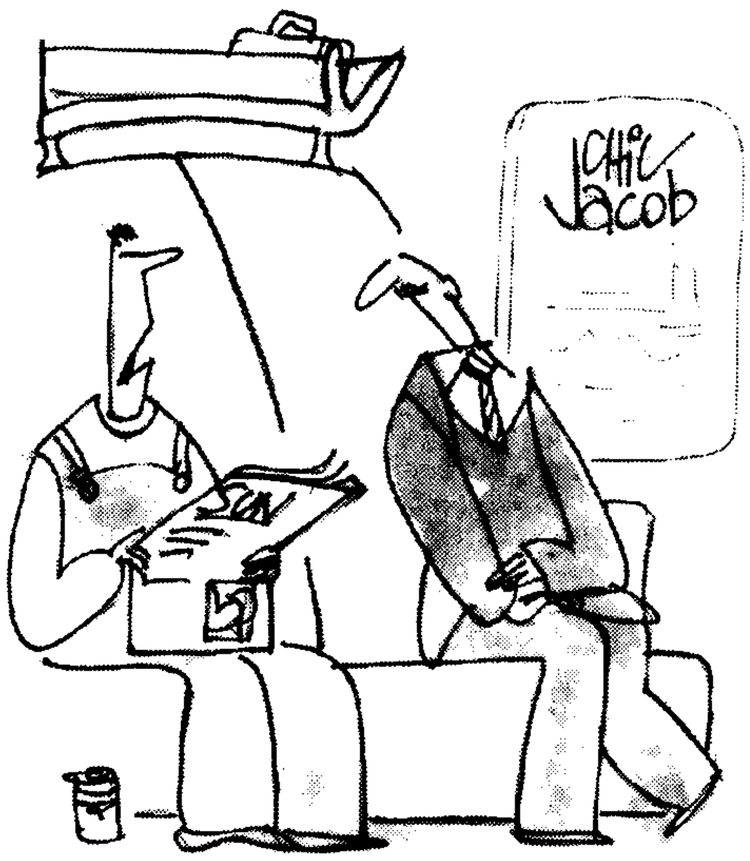
Dozens of hacks and executives had volunteered to give evidence on Connew's behalf, and were looking forward to causing maximum embarrassment for Bridget. Now that Connew has settled, all hopes are pinned on another of Rowe's victims, Amanda Platell, who is alleged to be penning a scandalously satirical novel called *The Paper Prince*, which features a foul-mouthed, tyrannical, incompetent female newspaper boss. Any resemblance to the foul-mouthed, tyrannical, incompetent "Death" Rowe is, of course, entirely accidental.

MEANWHILE with her obsessive interest in the love-lives of minor "celebrities", it is surprising that *Sunday Mirror* supremo Bridget "Death" Rowe has missed a splendid story on her own doorstep.

It concerns a rich, glamorous bimbo — and her rather less glamorous husband, who is a former Irish showjumper and sometime lorry driver. For the past few years he has stayed at their home in Kent, feeding the horses and bringing up their son while his wife set out to conquer the media world.

Now that she has done so, the hapless hubby has been ditched. Bridget Rowe (for it is she) has left their Kentish farm and is lodging in the Docklands flat of Pat Moore, the woman whom she recruited recently as deputy managing director of the *Sunday Mirror* and *People*.

Bridget has few fans at Canary Wharf thanks to her crude and bullying management techniques (see *Eyes passim*). But la Moore is obviously a steadfast admirer: she has now moved into an office next door to Bridget's, so that she can be "on call" whenever "Death" needs some friendly advice. One other Mirror Group executive who has been providing moral succour is Charlie "Gorbals" Wilson. In spite of his reputation as a heartless thug, he has apparently been "solid as a rock" in his support for Rowe.



"Oi! Do you mind not invading my privacy"

JUST FANCY THAT!

● *John Kent in* Private Eye, *5 September 1997*

Diana's death saves Murdoch money

● *The* Guardian *reporting the Digger's comments following News Corporation's agm in Adelaide, 8 October 1997.*

MAGAZINE publisher EMAP Apex Publications was quick to hype the Scoop of the Year award it gave *Rail* magazine "for unearthing a news story about a 100mph InterCity West Coast train which failed to stop at Watford Junction station after its brakes failed".

The "scoop" appeared under a cover headline "West Coast tight-lipped over 100mph runaway" on 25 September 1996. EMAP judges proclaimed it "an armour-piercing double-barrelled scoop" — which it possibly was on 26 July 1996 when the *Eye* first wrote about InterCity West Coast's laconic response to our questions about a train which, er, had sped through Watford Junction on 10 July because its brakes had failed.

MANY of the *Grauniad*'s top columnists have written to Alan Rusbridger protesting at his bullying insistence that freelance contributors assign all their copyright to the paper. But Rubbisher is unmoved. In a letter to the NUJ he claims that "we have already completed written agreements on copyright with more than 2,000 freelances".

Though it seems unlikely that the *Grauniad* uses 2,000 freelances, it is certainly true that many have signed away their copyright — simply because they aren't paid until they do so. One victim of this extortionate technique is Rosa Monckton, whose long piece about Princess Diana was recently reprinted by the *Guardian*. Though she had asked that her syndication fee be paid to the princess's charity, the paper refused to shell out until she signed a form handing over all rights in the article. La Monckton gently pointed out that copyright actually belonged to herself and the *Sunday Torygraph*, which had originally published it.

Anyone whose byline appears in the *Grauniad* is now sent one of these forms automatically. After the paper printed an old poem by Dylan Thomas, the accounts department wrote to the long-dead poet warning him that he would not get his cheque until he signed away his rights. Another recipient was Sir Kingsley Amis — who, like Dylan Thomas, is in no position to sign anything these days.

ON 28 September the *News of the World* ran a full-page puff about the joys of "delicious Mauritius" as a honeymoon resort.

"Nestled on a sheltered beach inside the coral reef on the western side of the island, the plush surroundings of the four-star La Pirogue hotel — one of the prestigious Sun International group — offer particularly good value," it gushed.

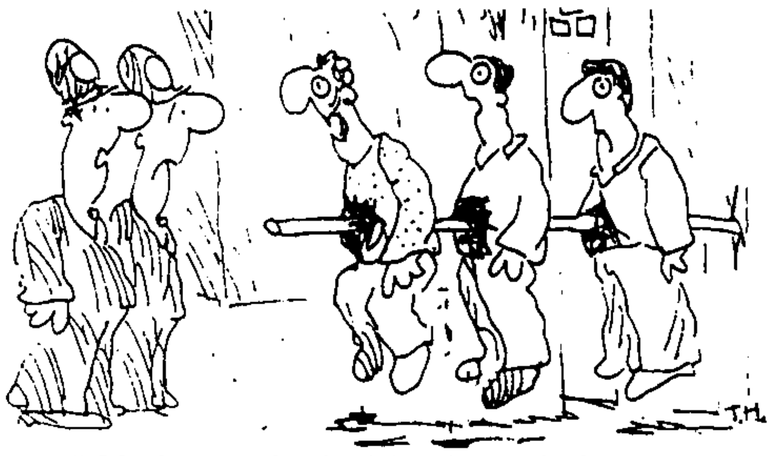
The owners of La Pirogue are understandably grateful. And on 25 October, *Screws* editor Phil Hall and his new bride will depart for a freebie honeymoon at... La Pirogue, Mauritius.

"FREE COPY OF *PUNCH*!" screams a headline on the front of *Loot* magazine. This is certainly a novel way of shifting all those unsold copies, and probably cheaper than paying for an industrial waste-disposal firm to cart them off.

What does Mohamed Fayed have to show for the £7m he has spent on the mag so far? According to one very well-placed source, news-stand sales of *Punch* are now just over 2,000.

LAST month the deeply moral *Sunday Sport* printed nude photos of a girl who was celebrating her 16th birthday that very day. As an alert reader pointed out, however, if she was 16 on the day they appeared then the pictures were presumably images of a 15-year-old — a minor, in other words.

This raises an interesting legal and ethical question. Is it all right for editors to keep photographic images of nude children on file and publish them once the models reach the age of consent? Perhaps the press complaints commission will discuss this interesting point with the *Sport*'s owner, porn-king David Sullivan. Come to think of it, Inspector Knacker might like to have a few words with him, too.



"Oh dear... looks like the Kebab Wars have started again"

DAVID "Rommel" Montgomery might want to rethink his plans for Mirror Group's "Academy of Excellence", which include the proposal to do away with sub editors and allow writers full control over their blatherings that appear on the page.

Presumably this would allow more stories like the "Benn Video Turns Nasty" piece that appeared in the *Mirror* on 30 September. It concerned Tony Benn's video diary of the Labour conference which was shown on the BBC's *Newsnight*. And according to the *Mirror* hack, this kind of work is entirely unacceptable "in traditional circles". In fact the piece found "one reporter" who claimed that Benn's readiness with a camcorder was "a disgrace to trade unionism... Multi skilling is the curse of our industry, leading to unemployment right across journalism".

Presumably, judging by Montgomery's recent form, the anonymous hack will be the first to join those statistics.

Tom and Gerry

FOGHORN-voiced hack John Sweeney has reacted with customary generosity to Nicholas Wapshott's *Times* review of his new book on Neil Hamilton.

"Dear Sir," he writes to the editor. "My old *Observer* colleague Nicholas Wapshott was remarkable for two things while on the paper: he poured Donald Trelford's gin and tonics for him; and he has the mind of a duck."

MICHAEL COLE, bouffant-haired "Voice of Harrods" and spokesman for Mohamed Fayed, was in startling form recently when his daughter Annabel was getting married.

Curiously, as father of the bride Michael made almost no mention of the, er, bride in his address. Instead he spent an inordinate amount of time attacking the media — as one does at one's daughter's wedding (if one's daughter works for the *Daily Mail*, as Annabel does).

ADAM RAPHAEL, consultant editor to the *Good Hotel Guide*, recently wrote a piece in the *Bookseller* attacking the leading "paid-for" hotel guide, Johansens, for failing to inform its readers that it took thousands of pounds from hotels in return for their inclusion. He quoted one hotelier who had praised Johansens because "you can more or less write your own entry".

Two weeks later a large piece appeared in the *Mail on Sunday* which roundly condemned the *Good Hotel Guide* on the eccentric grounds that it didn't list enough hotels in Taunton. What the paper forgot to disclose was that Johansens is wholly owned by Associated Newspapers, parent company of the *Mail on Sunday* — for which it earns at least £1m a year.

Merely an oversight, no doubt.

HACKWATCH

MALE AND FEMAIL

WOMEN, eh? Only interested in one thing — or so the *Daily Mail* would like to believe.

In the seventies David English built the paper's circulation on young, intelligent, professional women. The "Femail" section was deliberately designed to appeal to them.

Not any more. Under English's neanderthal successor Paul Dacre, Femail now treats its distaff readers with scarcely-disguised contempt. The *Mail* may not have gone quite as far as the leering, laddish *Daily Star* — whose women's page, now renamed "Star Girl", includes a column headed "Beauty Bollox" — but it is heading that way fast. As one Femail hackette argued on 3 April this year, "after a quarter of a century of struggle to be taken seriously, it seems that some intelligent women cannot resist the siren call of sheer silliness..."

24 April: Femail proudly launches the Fluffy Club, "the most significant new movement for women since Germaine Greer wrote *The Female Eunuch*". According to the Fluffy Manifesto, women should speak softly, flutter their eyelashes as often as possible and always, *always*, defer to men. "Our ambition," explains the club's founder Cherri Gilham, an unashamed bimbo who used to appear on the Benny Hill show, "is to giggle, pout, flirt and coo our way to emancipation."

25 April: "Forget the general election. There's only one subject Britain is talking about — the Fluffy Manifesto." Anti-feminist hack David Thomas contributes a full-page endorsement, urging women to wiggle their hips, totter about on high heels, bathe themselves in "girly scent" and practise a "breathy, come-hither voice".

29 April: Two pages of comments from "Fluffragettes" who support the *Mail*'s new campaign. "I love being thought of as helpless, scatty and unable to carry a bag, let alone a suitcase," one reader simpers. "I never argue with my husband," another reveals, "always bring him his morning cup of tea and nurse him when he's ill. I laugh at his jokes and dress up for him."

1 May: "Should you *ever* wear leggings?" Certainly not, says David Thomas. "Wobble, wobble, wobble, down the road they come, like a herd of shrink-wrapped hippos... Check the Lycra straining over those pear-shaped figures, desperately holding back the flesh like the skin around an over-stuffed sausage. Notice the fabric starting to sag under all those bottoms..." Just what a Femail reader needs to cheer her up in the morning — a torrent of manly abuse.

2 May: Former Page Three girl Jilly Johnson reveals the tricks of the womanly trade. "I had tons of attention with men pursuing me all the time," she reminisces. "To go out with that kind of man you have to look right, be cool but at the same time sweet and clinging. Just be gorgeous, do as you're told, make him look fantastic, hang on his arm and look at him adoringly."

29 May: Lowri Turner explains why women shouldn't wear skimpy swimsuits. "Even if you spent the next three months on a stair-climber, you know your behind would still resemble blancmange. If the thought of revealing your own less than perfect bottom to the world is hideous, then the prospect of this summer's beaches being crowded with other people's is infinitely worse."

5 June: By way of variety, Jeanette Kupferman explains why middle-aged women shouldn't wear bikinis. Do you really want to reveal "every bump of cellulite, every bit of dimpled flesh, every unwanted fold"?

23 June: David Thomas is back with another blast against the female of the species. Under the headline "What makes men fall for mad Bunny-Boilers?", he explores the "fatal attraction that drives women to behave badly".

1 July: More on the ever-popular topic of Bunny Boilers. "Last week a male writer asked why men fall for crazy women... Are YOU one?" If you're at all assertive, you could well be.

29 July: Femail examines "the hotly debated question of what exactly it is that attracts men to women". David Thomas, as ever, has a ready answer: "Girls with long legs who wear teeny bikinis, stockings and Wonderbras, skirts that are weeny, red lips and blue eyes and blonde hair that swings, these are a few of my favourite things... For the awful truth about men is that we're closet romantics."

13 August: Another uplifting message for womankind: "When a woman turns 40, her thoughts often turn to cosmetic surgery. Wouldn't it be lovely to get rid of that double chin, those wrinkled eyes, the lines around the mouth?"

14 August: Why are modern women so ugly? "Because," say Julia Carling and Kate Shapland, "lots of us are too busy to cook balanced meals, so we live off junk food which doesn't give us — or our skin — the right nutrients to keep it healthy and young." Tut tut.

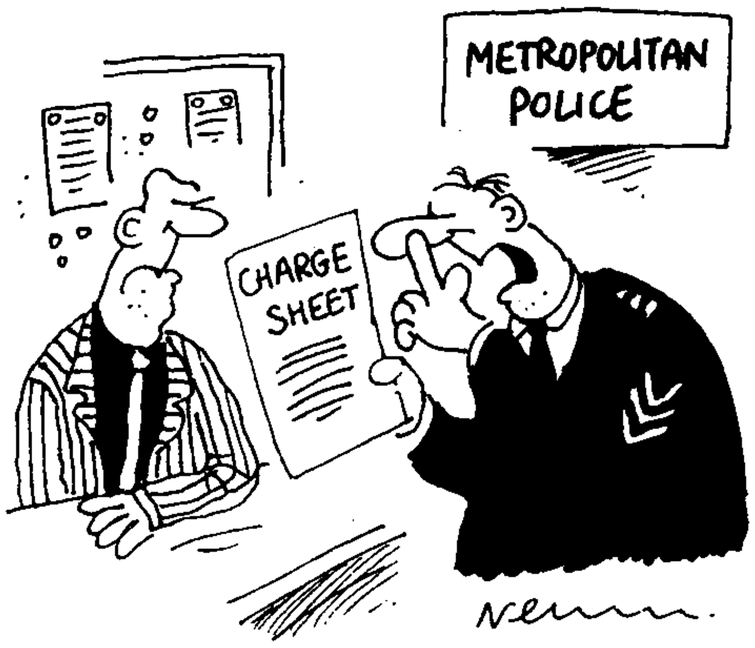
28 August: Simon Greenall (whoever he may be) reveals that "men absolutely hate kissing". Why? "Kissing is yucky. It's a girl thing." And girls are very yucky indeed — which is why, elsewhere in Femail, Julia Carling and Kate Shapland order their readers to "minimise imperfections" with a Lightening Touch stick from Body Shop, to "cover under-eye circles and blemishes".

18 September: The new "It Girl" Beverley Bloom is writing a weekly diary for Femail, presumably to raise the intellectual tone. At a wrap-party for the new James Bond film, she fails to meet Pierce Brosnan but enjoys ogling "the next best thing, his attractive body double, Dean". Later, at another "fashionable, ultra-trendy" party, someone spills a drink on Beverley's favourite Martine Sitbon mesh sandals. "Luckily, just then I remembered that shoe designer Christian Louboutin (a jet-set institution whom I know from my days in Paris) is opening up a shop in London this week."

2 October: Another breathless bulletin from Beverley Bloom. "On Wednesday night, I donned a slinky black number with a thigh-high split for an Elite Models party On Saturday, I took a hot date to the Tommy Hilfiger party at Browns nightclub, making quite an entrance in my new backless silver chainmail Paco Rabanne top."

Amid all this witless wittering, there has been one dissenting voice. In Femail on 4 September, Hilary Burden argued that the plummeting sales of magazines such as *Options*, *She* and *Woman's Journal* were "hardly surprising": for far too long female editors "have assumed that all their readers are interested in are the selfish pursuits of sex, shopping and cellulite".

Could she by any chance have been referring to Ms Jackie Annesley, editor of Femail?



"It'll cost you 50 grand to get away with it"

IN THE TEAROOM

DOES William Hague's latest doctrine of "caring Conservatism" and new found tolerance of single mums, adulterers and gays mark a decisive split with the values of the past? Fat chance. All this is driven by the most Victorian value of them all: pure self-interest.

Let's face it: there is nothing like the experience of sudden redundancy with little or no prospect of a juicy directorship to teach a former Conservative backbencher the merits of compassion. And it's a bit tricky to make a conference speech slagging off unmarried mothers with party chairman Cecil Parkinson pinkly presiding up on the platform.

No sooner had the word gone out that extra-marital sex was no longer a sacking offence than there was so much rumpy pumpy going on upstairs at Blackpool's Imperial Hotel that the ceiling fell in on the champagne bar below.

As for gays, the new tolerance provides a handy relief for those close advisers, daily closeted with the boss, whom the media vultures have been circling for some time. Spinmeister Alan Duncan has rightly perceived that hypocrisy is no longer "the tribute vice pays to virtue" but the excuse the tabloid editor takes to the Press Complaints Commission to justify splashing a sleaze scandal.

But if sexual hypocrisy is out, political hypocrisy is still definitely in. Almost every shadow cabinet speaker won a cheer from the conference floor by blaming "certain elements in the parliamentary party" for losing the Conservatives the general election. But *no one* called these people by their name: "Eurosceptics". Euroscepticism is, of course, the new orthodoxy and there will be zero-tolerance of any other view. Stephen Dorrell, Sir George Young and David Curry should watch their backs.

'Urquhart'

ALL Tory eyes are fixed on the Winchester by-election which the party hopes to win, Uxbridge-style, with a comfortable majority. The slightest sign of an electoral revival is expected to provide the excuse for Michael Heseltine to abandon his safe seat at Henley (majority: 11,167) in favour of... Chris Patten.

Hezza, who is furious with Hague and Co for threatening to rubbish his beloved Millennium Dome project, has already bought back his shares in the publishing giant Haymarket and would like to be back in charge when the firm is floated (netting Hezza about £200m).

IN TUNE with young master Hague's vision for the Tories, former Winchester MP Gerry Malone is vigorously reinventing himself as he prepares to fight a by-election — thanks to the high court's decision to set aside the 1 May result — for the seat he lost to the Lib Dems by two votes at the general election.

"At the top of Gerry Malone's agenda are environmental issues," proclaims the *Winchester Express*, the local Tory party mouthpiece. Malone, the rag claims, has become the champion of locals opposing a new service station at Shroner Wood on the M3. As "Swampy" Malone tells the *Express*: "This flies in the face of local opinion. I have been consulting with those running the campaign to block it about what should be done next."

Gerry Malone's name has not hitherto been counted among those of Britain's foremost environmental campaigners. As an MP for the party which drove through the controversial M3 Winchester bypass over Twyford Down, the Newbury bypass and countless other road projects, "Swampy" did not demur. Indeed, he once described Twyford Down protesters as "loonies" and "a menace" and told a local newspaper that the only thing wrong with the M3 extension was that its surface wasn't high-tech enough. In the 1993 edition of *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* he listed his hobbies as opera and, er, motoring.

But all that is behind him now, apparently. "We have exchanged an environment secretary who cared about the countryside for a townie who couldn't care less," he storms. At this rate, if Malone fails to unseat Lib Dem MP Mark Oaten at the forthcoming by-election he should always be able to find a refuge with the Greens.

"I'll be Blair, you be Hague — oops! Yours has fallen to bits by itself!"

WHILE Tory MPs prepared for their "bonding weekend" with William Hague, his old employers at McKinsey & Co, management consultants, were despatching their support staff on a similar jaunt — a "teambuilding exercise" in Mallorca.

The staff duly arrived at Stansted for an 8am flight, only to discover that the plane was at Gatwick. It then made its way to Stansted, where it developed a fault. Eventually the McKinseyites — famed for their ruthless efficiency — left for Spain at 6pm.

On arrival, tired and hungry, they found the hotel was expecting outside caterers to handle the feeding, and hadn't prepared any meals. So McKinsey bosses had to issue their increasingly disconsolate staff with "dinner vouchers".

How different, how very different, from William Hague's Conservative party...

SOURCES in the offices of both the prime minister and chancellor were quick to deny rumours in the *Financial Times* on 26 September that full participation in European monetary union would come sooner than might have been expected.

In the face of the biggest ever one-day jump on the stock market index, Blair's office stoutly maintained that no such change had taken place in government policy, while a source at the treasury denounced the story as "bollocks" and "crap" to the *Independent*.

No one, however, was more vociferous concerning the rumour than Diane Abbot, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington. She pinned the blame for the leak squarely at the feet of Gordon Brown's chief advisers, Charlie Whelan and Ed Balls. "New ministers, new advisers," she huffed. "They have not learnt that careless talk costs lives."

Presumably she was only referring to careless talk about treasury policy — as opposed, say, to denouncing "blonde, blue-eyed Finnish nurses" or the possibility that Anne Widdicombe might have "never had a fuck", two incidents which earned Abbot much embarrassment, and a near prosecution on a charge of inciting racial hatred, only last year.

Abbot gave a chastening warning to the treasury leakers: "They are suffering from hubris and hopefully last week's lessons will have taught them something." Something like the lesson she learnt when she was dropped from the treasury select committee in July after eight years' service. Good to see that rather than feeling bitter she's ready with handy advice for the new boys...

MORE from Scotland on the saga of Mohamed Sarwar, the suspended Labour MP for Govan. Gordon Archer, a former Glasgow Labour councillor, now claims there were also irregularities in Sarwar's election expenses.

Archer, who defected to the Scottish National party in June, was a sub-agent for Sarwar during his parliamentary campaign. He claims Sarwar's election team asked him to obtain a receipt for £50 for a rented office when it actually cost £500, the balance to be paid in cash because expenses were running high.

(A prospective MP is not responsible for expenses legally incurred before a general election — that remit falls to the candidate's election agent.)

FORMER Tory Scottish secretary Michael Forsyth bowed to public pressure when he said power lines for the Scotland to Northern Ireland electricity interconnector would have to run underground through four areas of unspoilt Ayrshire.

The Labour government appeared to have no problems when they gave the go-ahead to the £200m project; but the current Scottish secretary Donald Dewar is now thought to have introduced a waiver to the underground conditions agreed by his predecessor.

Should Mr Dewar stand firm, his reported decision will be met with outrage by local environmentalists and MEPs who would view the high-voltage lines as a blight running through many conserved areas of outstanding natural beauty.

ONE group Labour offended spectacularly during its Brighton conference was the mass of Arab ambassadors whose glittering soirée at the Grand Hotel attracted precisely no cabinet heavyweights at all.

Britain's trade with the Arab world runs into hundreds of millions of pounds, yet the big spenders got to meet, er, Clare Short and Welsh secretary Ron Davies. The equivalent event at the Tory conference last year was attended by prime minister John Major, deputy Michael Heseltine, foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind and the president of the board of trade Ian Lang.

The whereabouts of their Labour equivalents was the cause of much speculation; and the Arab grandees were bruised to learn that the previous evening chancellor Gordon Brown had made a speech to... Labour Friends of Israel.

NOOKS and CORNERS

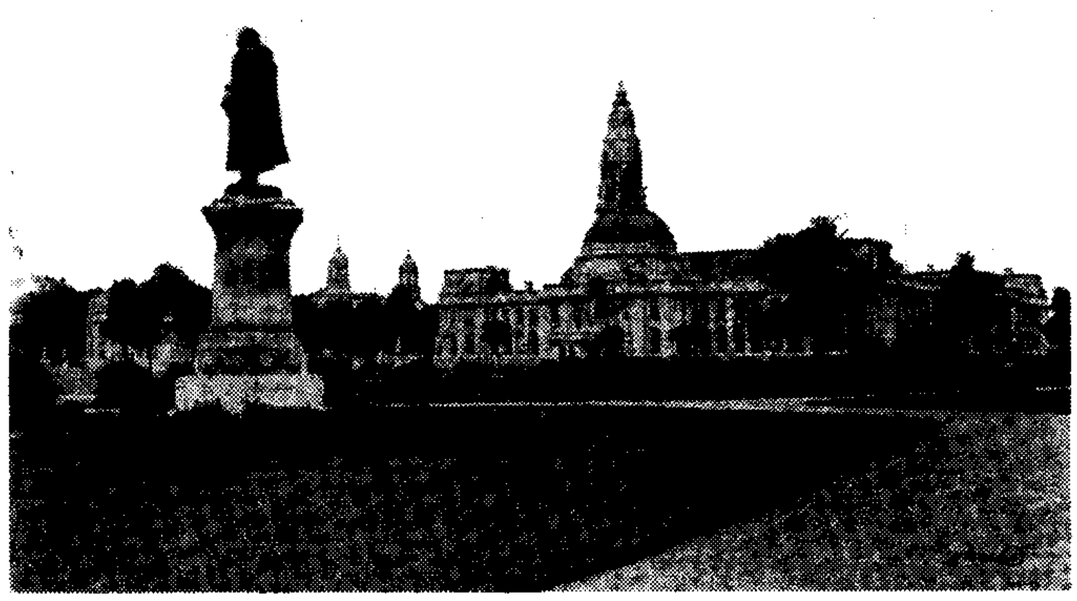
ARCHITECTURE can be a messy business. In his new book, *Opera House Lottery*, Lord Crickhowell — Nicholas Edwards as was — the former secretary of state for Wales, lambasts politicians both national and local over the Cardiff Bay Opera House fiasco.

Now this column is unable to agree with him that the loss of the incomprehensible winning design by the Iraqi pseud, Zaha Hadid, was a tragedy for Britain and the world; but there is no doubt that almost everybody behaved badly in this affair, not least glittering Sir Norman Foster, who wanted the job for himself, and the claque of aesthetes and deconstructionists who knew what was best for Wales and tried to foist Hadid on the principality.

What is clear is that the politicians and others who run Cardiff cannot be trusted in architectural matters and do not know how to look after good buildings, whether new or old. For Cardiff, in fact, has much fine historic architecture while the Civic Centre in Cathay Park constitutes the finest group of civic buildings anywhere in Britain. As John Hilling put it in his 1973 book on *Cardiff and the Valleys*, Cathay Park "to a large extent validates the town's claim to city status and national capital".

So is Cathay Park cherished and looked after? Er, no. The central, dominant building is the City Hall, opened in 1906. Designed by Lanchester & Rickards — architects of Deptford Town Hall and Methodist Central Hall in London — who won the competition held in 1897, this is one of the finest and jolliest examples of Edwardian

City Hall and Law Courts, Cardiff



Baroque in Britain: monumental, rich and truly civic. Now the building is essentially redundant: municipal government has moved to the former South Glamorgan County Hall, a bit of mediocre 1980s postmodernism down by the docks in Cardiff Bay. And it has even been proposed to remove the fine statues of Welsh heroes in the Marble Hall — given to Cardiff by Lord Rhondda — and take them to docklands.

Worse, the old City Hall is now threatened with mutilation. In 1998, Cardiff is host to the wretched Euro summit. Last time this circus was held in Britain, Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh was (temporarily) mutilated for the politicians — without listed building consent. This time, it is proposed to take out the fittings of the council chamber in Cardiff City Hall — a particularly magnificent and complete Edwardian interior. Of course, they say it will all go back again, but so often things seem to get lost... And in this case the spoliation is not even being done to cheer up the Europoliticians; the council chamber is to be simply a press room while the politicians will actually meet to share jokes in the assembly hall. So — as in Edinburgh — one of the finest buildings in Britain is to be mucked about with just for a few days of hot air.

Now that Wales is to have its own assembly, the obvious candidate to house it is, of course, Cardiff City Hall. But no; it is not modern enough. Besides, it has the disadvantage of occupying the finest site in the city. Just as in Edinburgh there is pressure to exile the Scottish parliament to dismal, distant Leith, so in Cardiff everything has to go to Cardiff Bay — the former dock area almost a mile from the city centre which enterprise boards and architects hope to regenerate and so make a killing. So never mind the national interest, or the convenience of the people of Cardiff: the Welsh assembly must be housed in an exciting new building down in the docklands — the design no doubt chosen by a committee chaired by Sir Norman Foster.

But the City Hall is not the only piece of fine architecture at risk from local politicians. The former Glamorgan County Hall is also now redundant. Won in competition in 1908 by the young Vincent Harris, who went on the become the *doyen* of town hall builders, it is another magnificent Edwardian Classical building in Cathay Park. But, thanks to the Conservative government's constant fiddling with local government, Cardiff now enjoys the ministrations of a single tier — Cardiff city council — so the old County Hall has been sold to the university. And as the university has recently wrecked the library in W.D. Caroe's University College building in Cathay Park, this is probably a fate worse than death.

Then there is Ty Bronna, a house in St Fagans Road in Cardiff by the great Arts & Crafts architect C.F.A. Voysey, long used by the ambulance service. It is now proposed to build 36 dwellings in the grounds, which will wreck its setting and jeopardise the future of the house itself. Need I go on? Of course, all these threatened buildings are listed, but CADW — the Welsh English Heritage — is spineless. Indeed, the organisation has recently moved into the building used by the Welsh office, no doubt to be more conveniently at the beck and call of politicians. Poor old Cardiff.

'Piloti'

BRIGHTON BEACH MEMORIES

THE stage-managed standing ovation for Tony Blair was so tiresomely prolonged even some Labour MPs wanted to be sick.

Chris Mullin shouted across to the wildly clapping turncoat Tory Michael Howarth — who used to cheer wildly for Mrs Thatcher when he was a Conservative — "You've had plenty of practice at this sort of thing, Michael."

"She would have blushed at this," replied the new Labour minister gaily before adding: "In fact Kim Il Sung would have blushed at this."

After the speech, foreign secretary Robin Cook tried to fawn sycophantically over his leader — and fell flat for his pains. The hall didn't like it and the Führer took his response to be distinctly lukewarm. Cook said it was the 31st leader's speech he'd heard and it was "one of the best". "Does he mean it is second best or 29th?" asked a leadership loyalist.

IN FACT Robin Cook had such a lousy week that even his famous wit was tested over dinner at the Metropole.

Cook was on good form until Piers Morgan, editor of the *Daily Mirror*, kept making nudge nudge, wink wink comments about the foreign secretary's girlfriend Gaynor Regan, likening the romance to that between David Mellor and Antonia de Sanchez.

"That," barked Robin, "was squalid. Utterly unlike mine." Abruptly he then said he needed to go to bed.

"We all know what that means," smirked the Moron.

"I beg your pardon?" snapped Cook. "Of what possible interest is it what time I go to bed?"

"Ah," leered Moron. "Depends what time you go to sleep!"

MEANWHILE chancellor Gordon Brown and girlfriend Sarah Macaulay endured a thoroughly unpleasant encounter with some media trash.

As they were leaving Wheeler's restaurant late one night, a not very glamorous TV star, novelist and former Sunday newspaper editor swept in accompanied by a forlorn-looking LBC radio presenter called, er, her husband. Brown was stunned when the larger than life mystery woman suddenly tried to smother him in kisses. Clearly having no idea who she was, the iron chancellor then fled into the night.

The woman then told her husband to order the kitchens to reopen to serve them. But the husband was completely ignored. Thus it was that Eve Pollard, late of the Tory-supporting *Sunday Express*, and "Sir" Nicholas Pollard, late of the Tory-supporting *Daily Express*, were seen wandering into the night searching for... pizza. So the conference wasn't all bad, after all.

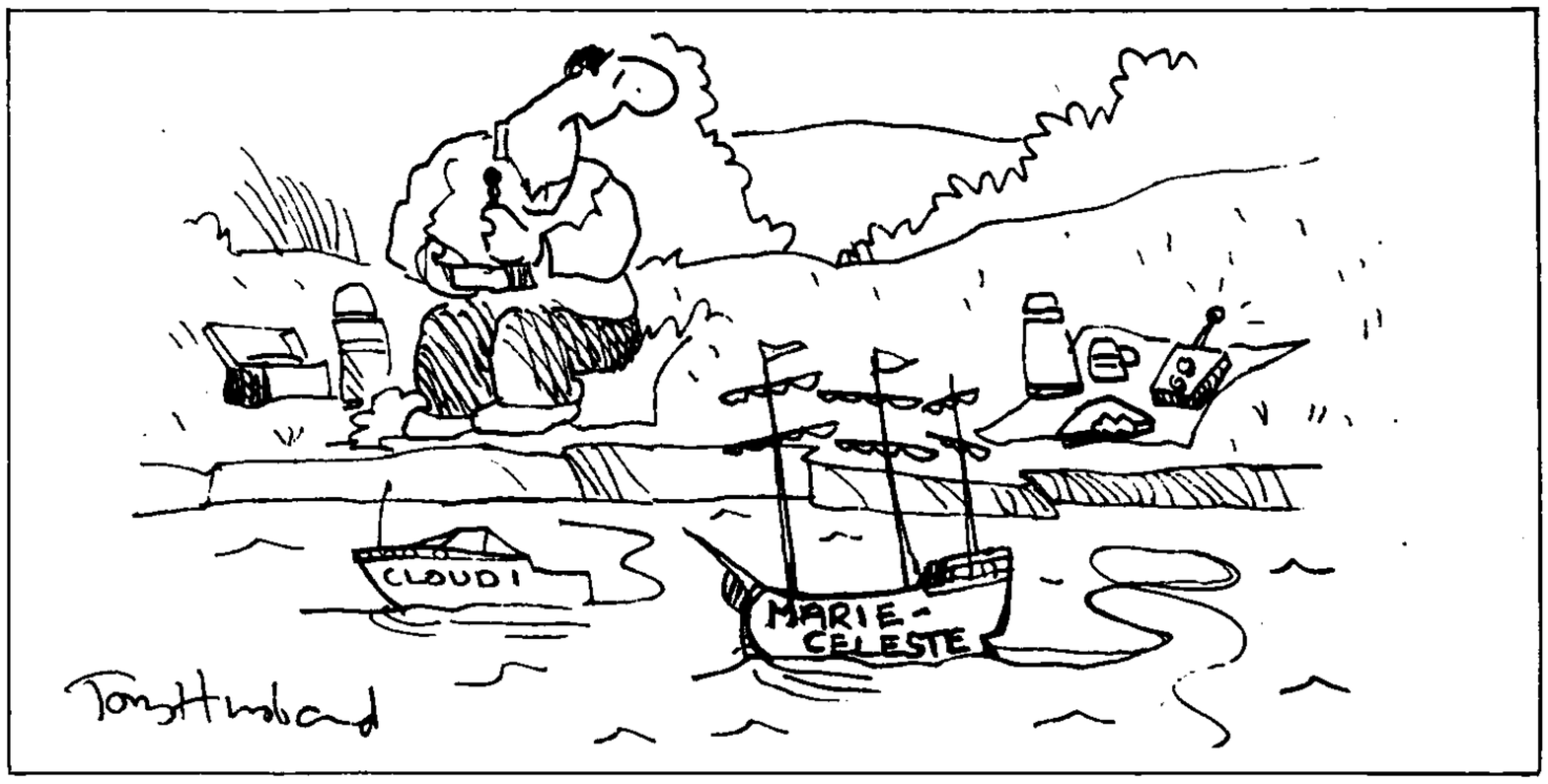
CHRIS SMITH, cuddly minister for arts, was so overcome by the excitement of conference he briefly veered off message and whinged about having to accept the cabinet pay cut.

Like most of the cabinet he was staying at the Metropole. "I have to pay for this hotel," he confided. "Sunday to Thursday — that's 700 quid. And it comes out of my own pocket! The party doesn't pay, you know."

JACK STRAW, home secretary, may be winning plaudits from even the Tories for his tough tactics, but for how long?

The *Oxford Dictionary of Eponyms*, under the heading "Jack Straw", defines the name of our leading child vigilante as: "The description of someone of little substance or significance, or of not great importance, as a *Jack-straw*." Oh dear.

'Backbiter'



EYE

Animal Hospital
Mysteries With Carol Vorderman
(both BBC1)

BLAME John F. Kennedy. Nowadays anyone who takes on a high profile job is given 100 days to sort the mess out, after which vultures begin to circle and jackals start writing sarcastic pieces in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Or if you are David Liddiment, newly installed behind the largest desk at ITV Network Centre, you forestall such criticism by giving yourself 100 days before anyone else can give it to you. As this magazine appears, Liddiment has about 85 days left, and probably around the same number of sleepless nights.

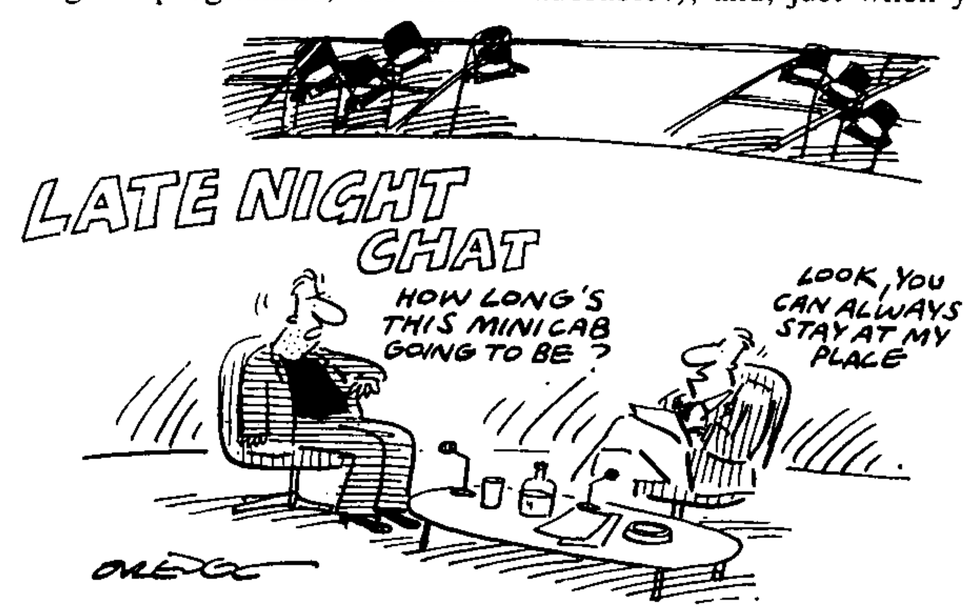
It's not even that the BBC is beating ITV at its own game. No, the BBC is beating ITV at the game ITV should be playing if it wasn't still playing the same game it won years ago. The future, ITV thought, was in drama and game shows: big fat expensive drama alternated with cheap production line drama, with Michael Barrymore to fill in the gaps. Sitcoms could go hang, while factual stuff could be safely left to BBC2. The corporation could never compete with such a ruthlessly unimaginative strategy, much as though it tried. ITV sat back, hoicked up advertising prices and enjoyed the ride.

But that was before *Animal Hospital*. Unable to compete in bland ratings-grabbing drama, or even to employ anyone who knew how to make it, the BBC fell back on Rolf Harris and his poorly pets. Twelve million viewers instantly tuned in, provoking a hurried extension of the series and the immediate commissioning of an awful lot of similar series. Viewers, it turned out, were bored to death of the ITV formula, especially when ineptly reproduced by the BBC. What they wanted were popular factual programmes, usually featuring children or furry animals, which could be knocked out in huge quantities for virtually no cost. The BBC couldn't believe its luck.

And so we have boldly entered the age of Rolf. Now cheap new factual shows flood the schedule, costing the licence fee payer virtually nothing and cheerfully attracting audiences in their millions. *Mysteries With Carol Vorderman* is typical. "On tonight's programme, the man who underwent surgery without anaesthetic. Did Glenn Miller leave a clue to his disappearance? [Answer: No.] And can dolphins help sick children?" In sprints Carol, glassy eyed after another hard day in the *Countdown* studio, to introduce three mildly interesting but almost criminally familiar items on "mysteries that defy simple explanation".

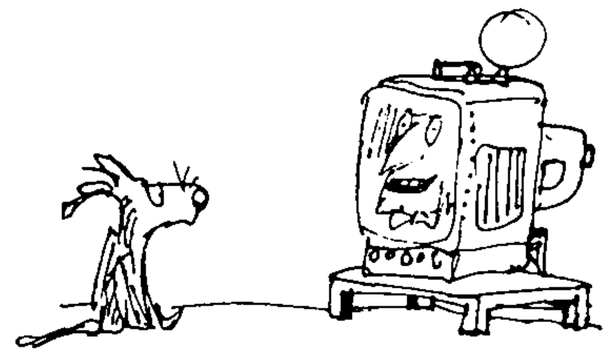
Heard that one before? Only on about 5,000 identical series commissioned since *The X-Files* made its mark. But while these post-Rolf shows take no prizes for originality, what they all have in common is a modest, unassuming quality generally associated with risibly low budgets. It's hard to imagine anyone purposely tuning in to *Mysteries With Carol Vorderman*, but if you happened to find it, you would probably spend a pleasant half hour in its company. It asks little, and delivers only a little bit more, which will probably be enough to attract eight million viewers every week.

And so the series pour out. Last week the early evening BBC1 schedule included *Holiday Memories* (sorry celebrities revisit old holiday destinations); *Crime Beat* (Martyn Lewis's "good news" crime show); *Animal People* (wildlife bilge narrated by Peter Sissons); *Watchdog With Anne Robinson* (lots of production staff in the background on the phone to their friends); *Vets In Practice* (follow-up to *Vets' School*); *Children's Hospital* (aren't they adorable?); and, just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, *Weekend Watchdog With Anne Robinson*. Whole series of each of these would cost less than a single episode of *Inspector Morse*.



Poor Liddiment must be gnashing his teeth. If he followed BBC1 and commissioned vast quantities of cheap popular factual programmes, his advertisers would run screaming. They want drama, because it's prestigious, and they want it to be popular, in order to maximise audiences. In other words, they want precisely what ITV has forgotten how to deliver. Michael Barrymore could find himself a very busy man. Eighty-five days and counting...

'Couch Potato'



MEDIA NEWS

CHRIS EVANS has been reinventing himself as a bit of a fogey in a spate of interviews to promote his new breakfast show on Virgin Radio.

He hates computers and the "soundbite culture", he tells a sympathetic Simon Sebag Montefiore in the *Sunday Times*, preferring "the scratch of the nib, the gentle flow of old-fashioned ink".

He is monarchist, Eurosceptic, and something of a moralist. The Myra Hindley painting at the Royal Academy was "disgusting, abusive, insulting". Bad taste jokes are out-of-bounds. Mass murder, he observes sternly, is never funny.

Odd. In November last year a complaint against someone called Chris Evans was upheld by the Broadcasting Standards Commission after he made a terrible joke about the "diarrhoeaist" Anne Frank, who was murdered by the Nazis, on Radio 1. The BSC described it as "a tastless pun... unsuitable for broadcast".

But this must have been a completely different person to prissy Chris now ruling the roost at Virgin.

ALAN YENTOB, the BBC's director of television, is clearly impressionable: when he met Rosie Boycott, the *Independent on Sunday*'s smokin' editor, at the Labour party conference, he was evidently so carried away by the atmosphere he told her he backed her paper's campaign to decriminalise cannabis all the way.

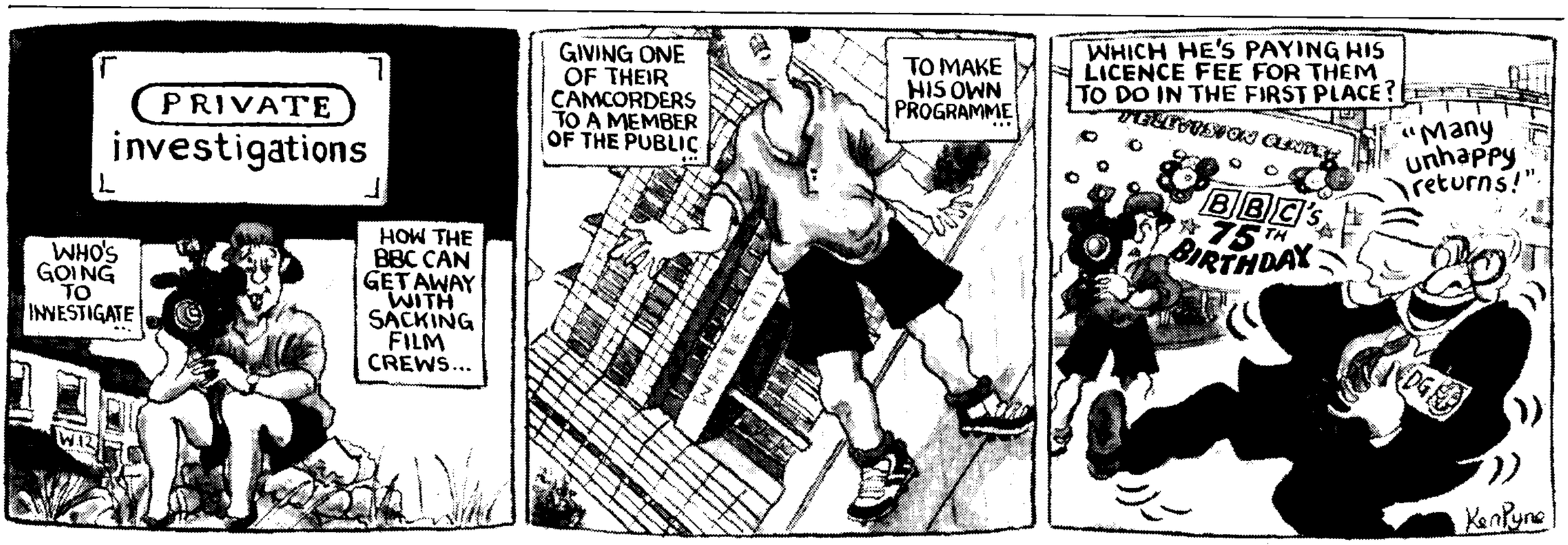
Yentob's name duly appeared in the list of celebrity supporters which appeared in the paper on 5 October. But when John Birt saw the *Sindie* he gave Yentob an almighty bollocking. Hence a letter from Yentob in the *Sindie* on 12 October: "You have inadvertently included my name in the list of signatories to your campaign to decriminalise cannabis. I am not a signatory to this document nor, as the BBC's director of television, would I take a position on this issue."

Heavy, man!

L!VE TV's big-budget bash at the Dorchester was a predictably decorous occasion.

Highlights included Kelvin Mackenzie attempting to climb on a table to dance but falling off like a headless Teletubby, and boorish Richard Littlejohn boring all and sundry about the state of the *Daily Mail* since the election. ("They've lost the plot, none of 'em know what they're doing any more.")

It was also nice to see podgy L!VE TV executive Nick Ferrari taking such a close and solicitous interest in the welfare of his female staff — especially the lovely Tiffany, who presents the aptly-named *Big City Tips*...


PRIVATE investigations
WHO'S GOING TO INVESTIGATE...
HOW THE BBC CAN GET AWAY WITH SACKING FILM CREWS...
GIVING ONE OF THEIR CAMCORDERS TO A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC...
TO MAKE HIS OWN PROGRAMME...
WHICH HE'S PAYING HIS LICENCE FEE FOR THEM TO DO IN THE FIRST PLACE?
"Many unhappy returns!"
BBC's 75TH BIRTHDAY
Ken Pyne

I-BSkyB

How do viewers without satellite or cable cope? Normal telly is so dull, we channel-surf constantly.

GARRY BUSHELL
The Sun

CONTRIBUTOR: Matthew Crawford.

An occasional column for which readers are invited to submit Sky-plugs masquerading as news items in Murdoch papers. The usual £10 will be paid.

AT THE end of September the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) announced that it had withdrawn a threat of legal action against BSkyB after the satellite TV operator agreed to introduce fairer and clearer contracts for subscribers.

The OFT, following complaints from viewers, heavily criticised BSkyB contracts for being full of "legal jargon" and "nasty surprises" in the small print. They allowed BSkyB to get away with frequent price rises, changing channel packages and imposing pay-per-view. After the OFT threatened to prosecute BSkyB (under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994) the company agreed to introduce new terms and conditions from November.

The story was duly reported on 1 October in the *FT*, the *Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Curiously, not a word appeared in those dailies normally so keen to spread the good news about BSkyB (prop. R Murdoch): the *Times* and the *Sun*. Funny that.

BBC staff logged on at their Birtist work stations the other day to find individually-tagged electronic advice from one Rodney Baker-Bates, director of finance and information technology, reminding them of their "responsibilities" concerning the correct use of email.

"Misuse by staff could easily bring the BBC into serious disrepute," wrote Rodney, warning them not to download or transmit pornographic or offensive material.

Andy Kershaw, roving BBC correspondent and "easy listening" specialist for Radio One, was so moved by this guidance that he replied to Baker-Bates forthwith. "Not since my school reports have I read such a pile of pompous, self-serving shite," he wrote back through BBC cyberspace, for all to read. "Whether reporting from Rochdale or Rwanda, I have been acutely aware of these responsibilities for many years, long before the Birtian regime employed double-barrelled nonentities like yourself to lecture dedicated public service broadcasters on the blindingly obvious, while sucking up licence-payers' money to do so. I have a similar suggestion for you. Why don't you fuck off?"

LUVVIES

"I always used to fall in love while I was working on a film," she says, referring to affairs she had with, amongst others, the actor Marcello Mastroianni and the director Milos Forman.

"It's such an intense thing, being absorbed into the world of a movie. It's like discovering you have a fatal illness, with only a short time to live. So you live and love twice as deeply. Then you slip out of it, like a snakeskin, and you're cold and naked and alone again."

NASTASSIA KINSKI
Independent

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

JOHN BIRT's regime has been basking in the box office success of *Mrs Brown*, the BBC's film dramatisation of the real-life relationship between Queen Victoria and Jock Brown, both of whom are conveniently dead.

Under Birt's latest diktat, all BBC dramas featuring living characters now require the consent of each individual being portrayed. Where this leaves reconstructions on *Crimewatch* has yet to be clarified, but it almost certainly rules out the BBC ever again producing drama-docs about political controversies, miscarriages of justice or medical malpractice, to pick just three areas where at least some participants vital to the storyline will want to exercise the veto Birt now grants them.

If living individuals can object to being portrayed dramatically, how long will it be before politicians are allowed to put a stop to troublesome news footage in historical documentaries?

IT WASN'T only Glenn Hoddle who had selection headaches before last Saturday's crucial world-cup game in Italy. Colin Hancock, ashen-faced supremo of Radio One's *Newsbeat*, rocked his own team's big-match preparations by naming himself as captain.

Irate *Newsbeat* hacks pointed out that past editors had never travelled away with the team before, and that his self-inclusion was a needless extravagance at a time when the programme is facing cuts and possible redundancies.

It would, however, be absurd to suggest that his trip to Rome was nothing more than a freebie at the licence-payers' expense.

UNFORTUNATELY PINK PANTHER'S FATHER WAS HOMOPHOBIC

"I'd like to be a woman, please"

DIANABALLS

"ALL OF us at Hewlett-Packard shared in the nation's grief at the recent loss of Diana, Princess of Wales," according to a tasteful junk-mailing sent out last week. "Hewlett-Packard therefore invites you to help us to raise funds for the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund."

How so? Hewlett-Packard is changing the format and delivery of its Price Guide, and "as part of that process your feedback and inputs are important to us. We would appreciate it if you would take the time out to complete the following survey and return it to us. For every survey returned, we will send a donation to Diana, the Princess of Wales Memorial Fund."

As the leaflet notes, "for many, she stood for courage, strength and above all compassion". And, presumably, moral blackmail and shameless commercial exploitation, too…

In London, meanwhile, a "marketing" company called Romax, which sells mailing lists to businesses and charities, made its own similarly tasteful "tribute". A leaflet promoting the company's services proclaimed: "As of 10 September 1997 the directors of Romax Marketing & Distribution Ltd in a mark of respect for the charitable work done by Diana, Princess of Wales, voted unanimously to lower the cost of their Mailing Services by a further and permanent 5 percent."

LEGAL NEWS

ANTHONY JULIUS, the solicitor who negotiated Princess Diana's divorce, works hard to present himself as a Renaissance Man.

He has written a well-received book on T.S. Eliot's anti-semitism; he pens philosophical essays for upmarket newspapers; he appears on *Late Review*; and only last month he grabbed yet more flattering publicity by appointing Ms Lavinia Greenlaw as "poet in residence" at Mishcon de Reya, the firm of which he is a senior partner. Oh, and he is an unpaid trustee of the Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

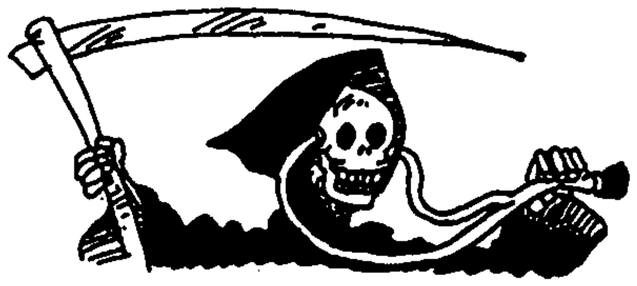
But now it transpires that behind that donnish facade is just another rich lawyer earning £400,000 a year. Two weeks ago the *Observer* revealed that Julius has drawn up a trust deed that will enable the Princess of Wales Memorial Fund to pay for his legal advice — even though other solicitors have volunteered to provide the same service free. Kate Day, who is on secondment to the charity from Mishcon de Reya, insisted there was no conflict of interest with his role as trustee — since "Anthony would have to leave the room when fees were discussed".

Even so, his businesslike approach to charity may surprise anyone who read an article published by the *Guardian* in May this year, in which Julius lamented the greed of Camelot bosses and other corporate fat-cats. Although some well-paid executives were happy to give time or money to charity, he concluded, "it's regrettable that there seem to be few of them around at present".

In the same piece, Julius described the appalling avarice he had witnessed a few years ago "in the office of one of the eighties plutocrats — one of the most oversized of them". The man suffered from a severe "moral failing" and "utterly incontinent acquisitiveness".

Though Julius didn't name him, the plutocrat was in fact Robert Maxwell. But did the sensitive solicitor mention his doubts about Cap'n Bob at the time? Er, no. During the late 1980s, Julius collected huge fees in return for bullying and persecuting the journalist Tom Bower, who was striving to expose the fat man's "moral failings". As Bower notes in his book *Maxwell: The Final Verdict*, Julius and his colleagues "betrayed no hint of doubt about their client's virtues. On the contrary, they pursued his mission with depressing vigour, commitment and pitilessness".

Clearly Julius's fellow-trustees at the Princess Di charity think he is just the man to represent the caring, giving spirit of England's Rose.



DOING THE ROUNDS

Dubious Operations Number 1: Male Circumcision

EVERY YEAR more than 30,000 boys are circumcised in Britain. Yet 13,000 of these operations, which are done for supposed medical reasons, are unnecessary. With a complication rate of between 2 and 10 percent, and an increasingly litigious public, medical circumcisions are becoming a medico-legal time bomb.

Most are performed for "non-retractile foreskin", an entirely normal condition that requires no treatment whatsoever. For many boys the foreskin doesn't retract until the age of three, and in some it doesn't until they are teenagers.

Most GPs and general surgeons have little specialist training in the structure and functions of the foreskin, and confuse this condition with phimosis, an actual scarring and narrowing of the foreskin. This is rarer and, when it results in recurrent infections, may need circumcision. Other cases resolve with time and the help of hydrocortisone cream. The only absolute indication for childhood circumcision is a very rare skin condition called BXO.

The argument that mass medical circumcision is justifiable on the grounds of hygiene and the reduced risk of cancer of the penis and sexually transmitted diseases does not bear scrutiny. Cancer of the penis may be slightly more common in uncircumcised men, but it is in any case very rare and the extra risk of cancer is very much reduced by washing.

The increased risk of genital infections is unproven: uncircumcised men in Africa seem to have a higher incidence of AIDS, but this has not been proven in western culture. In truth, mass circumcision as practised in America, where 60 to 90 percent of men are foreskinless, has nothing to do with medical science but far more to do with public misunderstanding and the cultural need to be "a regular guy".

What of the complications? Far from being a simple snip, circumcision is a complex procedure that requires considerable skill. Complications range from amputation of the penis, damage to the glans and urethra, haemorrhage, infection and poor cosmetic results. The Medical Defence Union has 50 files open on allegations of negligence, with most cases involving GPs. In the very unlikely event of MD's son ever requiring circumcision, MD would insist on the operation being done in hospital under general anaesthetic by an experienced paediatric surgeon.

Anaesthesia is rarely an issue in religious circumcision, most of which are done outside hospital on conscious, new-born infants. The ethical debate as to whether a humane society should tolerate the genital mutilation of baby boys in the name of religion rages on, but the widespread practice of performing this ritual without any form of analgesia is truly barbaric. Several studies from Toronto have shown that newborns suffer considerable pain during this procedure (as assessed by facial expressions, heart rate and blood pressure), and that local anaesthetic cream can reduce this. Five months later, circumcised boys also exhibit more pain and cry more in response to routine immunisations, suggesting a longer term effect on pain thresholds.

In essence, medical circumcisions are grossly over-performed, never justified under the age of three and rarely before five. Religious circumcisions on new-borns are especially risky as the penis is so small. They should only be performed by competent practitioners with adequate pain relief and preferably when the child is old enough to make an informed choice.

M.D.

NUKES AND NUKEMEN

NIREX, the nuclear industry's troubled radioactive waste executive, was shattered when John Gummer, the former environment secretary, rejected its plan for a waste dump at Sellafield. But under Labour it has appointed a new chairman — and the choice is significant.

Step forward David Bonser, a director of British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), which exists only to dispose of nuclear leftovers. Well informed observers take his appointment to mean that the government intends to continue backing nuclear power and to allow it to add to the mountain of radioactive waste — in apparent contravention of official Labour party policy.

The department of trade and industry (DTI) has two members on the Nirex board who voted for Bonser, his selection being a further strike in the war between the DTI and the department of the environment. Nirex, having lost the argument over deep burial, is expected to settle for surface storage where the waste can be monitored but will be left for future generations to dispose of. This, say the experts, does not fit the DoE's policy of "sustainable development" because it cannot be sustained indefinitely and there is still no agreed policy on what to do with the waste.

The Nirex board *could* have decided to shut down the organisation on the grounds that it could do no more. Or it could have found an independent chairman from outside the industry. Instead it will be obliged to find a policy that will keep the nuclear power stations operating — and producing the waste BNFL needs to justify its existence.

The DTI's Margaret Beckett, president of the board of trade, gave the game away in an interview with *Tribune* last month when she was asked: "Are there likely to be any additions to the existing nuclear power stations?" Instead of giving the politically correct answer — that Labour is committed to phasing out nuclear power, as the Great Leader Tony Blair himself declared when he was energy spokesman in 1989 — Beckett replied: "At this moment in time, I don't think one could say there will never be another nuclear power station built."

This has set off alarm bells. Someone in the monster department Michael Heseltine built had been briefing her. Beckett is under pressure from the nuclear lobby in the industry, in some trade unions and in parts of the government. Its argument is that she needs more nuclear power to enable her to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from coal and gas-fired power stations. The alternative would be major investment in renewable energy. But Gordon Brown, the iron chancellor, will resist spending any serious money on the environment.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on rolling stock companies

BRITAIN's three unregulated rolling stock companies (Roscos) are beating Railtrack hands down at making huge profits while investing peanuts.

The Roscos, which lease the former British Rail fleet to train operators, were meant to provide a long-term counterbalance to the operating franchises, most of which last seven years while a new train is expected to run for 35 years. It was assumed that franchisees would not buy new rolling stock in case they later lost their franchise; and so the Roscos were designed to be able to invest large sums in new trains on the basis that the trains would be needed by successive franchisees.

Leasing charges for existing rolling stock, including 2,200 carriages of a design long-since identified as a safety risk, were set extraordinarily high so the Roscos would not lack funds. This last element is the only one that has gone to plan: leasing charges are the second biggest expenditure for train operators, most of whom are heavily subsidised.

Porterbrook train leasing, owned by Stagecoach, made a profit of £80m on turnover of £180m in less than a year. Angel Train Contracts is reported to have made £109m profit on £270m turnover; and Eversholt Rosco £123m on £219m turnover. With such crazy returns it was not surprising two of the Roscos were soon resold for much more than the government had got for them, making multi-millionaires of some run-of-the-mill BR managers who happened to be in the right place at the right time.

But the high leasing fees charged by the Roscos for BR's old rubbish have had the opposite effect to that desired: they provide no financial incentive for the Roscos to invest in new trains. Another pearl of wisdom from the Tories' privatisation consultants was that the Roscos should be unregulated. Thus they can sit back and enjoy unrestrained profits.

Nearly all the BR fleet was tied to seven-year leases before privatisation, but when those leases expire the Roscos will be able to charge whatever they like. They face no genuine competition because there is relatively little spare rolling stock; and many trains are designed for specific sections of the network and switching to a different type of train would involve disruption and expense as staff are trained to handle the replacement stock.

Indeed, the Roscos have so comprehensively failed to take the initiative that Connex South Central feels able to dangle the carrot of buying new trains before the franchising director. Connex promises to buy new trains in return for an extension of its South Central franchise period. Connex no doubt thinks it has a good case, since it has 600 safety-risk carriages which the Roscos are not prepared to replace or strengthen. The same operator recently stripped 500 services a week from its timetable, so an extension to the franchise, if granted, would indicate the complete breakdown of the privatisation mechanisms.

Quite apart from the need to replace old trains and sub-standard ones, there is also a need to increase Britain's total train fleet if only because a booming economy will induce more rail travel. The government says it wants more people on trains but the present fleet does not have the capacity for any extra.

Roscos meanwhile are keeping a huge cache of 700 carriages, many of them modern and comfortable, out of use in army depots. And while passengers in Britain experience overcrowding (such as on Central Trains: see *Eye* 933), a number of good-quality British carriages are being shipped to, er, New Zealand. In desperation at least two train operators are even hiring carriages from... railway museums for daily services.

Although the Roscos have the market sewn up, their grotesque profits could be the seed of their demise. Train building companies, like GEC Alsthom and Adtranz, are willing to accept lower profits and take a longer-term view of business, and have already signed deals to lease trains direct to operators, bypassing the fat and unnecessary Rosco middlemen. Rosco managers must know their current strategy is leading nowhere and may therefore have decided they prefer to get rich quick rather than build a future for their companies or the travelling public, who must put up with overcrowded, uncomfortable or obsolete trains — or all three in some cases.

'Dr B Ching'

Rotten Boroughs

Coventry

HOW much does it cost to change 17 light-bulbs in a Coventry council-run children's home? Er, £514.

Under health and safety laws, staff aren't allowed to change bulbs themselves but must call Coventry Contract Services (CCS), the council's in-house maintenance team. The massive bill for changing bulbs at the Princethorpe Way home raised suspicions about CCS — and an inquiry into corruption and incompetence was immediately launched.

Since being formed (as a sop to Tory laws on compulsive competitive tendering), CCS has won most of the contracts awarded by the council. But it has not always given good value. In 1994-95, it predicted school meals would make a small profit. The contract lost £128,000. Last year the building services division lost £3.5m after carrying out pisspoor boiler repairs and failing to check gas appliances. Private contractors had to do the job properly. Town hall officers say £1m is missing from its budget over the last three years, and are investigating claims that:

- A CCS worker watered his boss's garden and was paid overtime.
- A deaf mute gardener was set on fire by CCS colleagues. They were sacked but police were not called.
- Ten CCS staff went to Worthing, expenses paid, for a wheelie bin It's A Knockout contest.
- A dustman who goes stock-car racing at weekends uses a council tipper-truck to transport his car.

Fourteen CCS workers have been suspended and officials are also looking into the role of several Labour councillors.

Rats of the Week

LUCKY for the Lib Dems that national treasurer Lord Tim Razzall does a better job for them than he does in Richmond where he chairs the policy committee. The normally lush borough has been choked in rubbish after the Lib Dems put collections out to tender and the in-house team won. In much of Richmond no bin was collected for weeks, and when rats were seen outside pizza parlours shopkeepers marched on the town hall. Richmond admitted that routes had been changed and that the private firm hired (for £80,000) to tell the public had taken the explanatory leaflets... and thrown them away.

Family Values

CALDER VALLEY's new Labour MP Christine McCafferty, beneficiary of a women-only shortlist, knows men have their uses — which must be why she appointed husband David Tarlo as her research assistant.

Christine and David remain Calderdale councillors so will also benefit from local allowances which rose last November by 30 percent for councillors (and by 77 percent for the leader). In May they rose again — justified, says the controlling Labour group, because being a councillor is essentially a full-time commitment. Shome mishtake, shurely?

Foul Mouth Of The Week

WHEN the Plain English Campaign tried to award Greater Manchester waste disposal authority a Golden Bull for gobbledegook the response from Oldham Labour member Jeremy Sutcliffe was plain.

He told the campaign's George Maher "Piss off you wanker". He then produced a leaflet in which he described the campaign's Chrissie Maher as a "stupid cow" and stuck it on Oldham town hall wall. Sutcliffe's colleagues forced him to apologise, but they should apologise for the leaflet about "aerobic composting of separately-collected putrescible household waste via a dedicated kerb-side collection".

Just Fancy That I

RESIDENTS of St Austell bay are baffled why their council is chucking money at the Eden project — the alternative millennium dome set to house the world's biggest greenhouse.

The project is opposed by the community, parish council and Green party, who believe it will increase traffic by more than a third. But Restormel council voted to give it £300,000 over three years, and pushed through a form to help it win a £10m EU grant. While the council says it will mean jobs, opponents might like to talk to their councillor, Neal Barnes. He can be reached via the, er, Eden project, where he has been site manager since August.

How to handle recruitment

NOT content with sending Sandra Walmseley, former social services director, away on a two-year course on full pay (*Eyes passim*)**, Tower Hamlets has lost £150,000 trying to replace her.**

Councillors paid £40,000 to Price Waterhouse to find a successor: Jim Lim, who for the last 18 months had been, er, acting as director in Walmseley's absence. Three weeks after starting as permanent director, Tower Hamlets dumped him. He left with the statutory big cheque and a ringing endorsement from Sylvie Pierce, chief executive, making his axing hard to fathom.

Glasgow

MORE allegations surface as factions battle for control of the city's discredited Labour administration. Claims that convenor of personnel Bailie William O'Rourke bullied and behaved inappropriately towards his secretary are to be "quickly investigated" — by his council peers. And it is claimed that Jim Coleman, chair of the licensing board, was the guest at Ayr races of Ladbrokes... who will be appearing before the board in a few weeks' time.

Just Fancy That II

PEOPLE in Stoke who have complained to the engineering department about the way Severn Trent Water keeps digging up the roads and making a mess have been ignored. The department's major client is... Severn Trent Water.

Pseuds Corner

Or is Charlotte [Raven] softer and more sentimental than she seems? "We have a good time together," says Julie [Burchill], "but there's not many evenings that don't end with us weeping about the workers."

Telegraph Magazine

The concourses are the ramblas and agoras of the future city, time-freeze zones where all the clocks of the world are displayed, an atlas of arrivals and destinations forever updating itself, where briefly we become true world citizens. Air travel may well be the most important civic duty that we discharge today, erasing class and national distinctions and subsuming them within the unitary global culture of the departure lounge.

J.G. BALLARD
The Observer

The Federation has a new corporate identity. Gentle rather than harsh, rounded rather than angular, cubist rather than abstract.

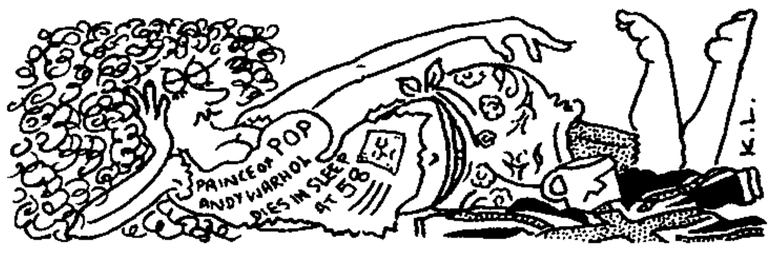
The Federation was founded at the time when cubism was also being created. Cubism is a form of art that is analytical, breaking down an object or figure into component parts and re-creating it as though seen from many different angles at once. When it was developed, Cubism was, and remains, a new way of representing the world.

In adopting a new corporate identity, we believe that cubism not only reflects our history, but is an appropriate reflection for the job we have to do. Responding to housing need in today's complex and multi-faceted society requires flexibility, imagination and vision.

National Housing Federation's Annual Report 1996/7

The "pile of dirty baby's nappies" that the ICA exhibited in the late 1970s was not a pile. The nappies were exhibited in cases, along with other material — notes, diagrams, etc — in order to document the process of weaning a child from milk to solids. The work, *Post Partum Document* by Mary Kelly, examined this process from a psychoanalytic perspective and the nappies traced the visual changes in faeces.

Extract from letter in The Times

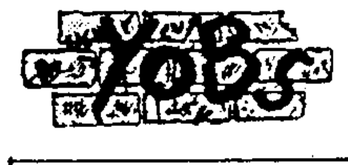


Rainey is totally in touch. She hangs out in Portobello, goes to the coolest clubs, mixes with the coolest people. She says she rarely looks at glossy magazines, but then she doesn't need to. They get many of their ideas by watching what girls like Ramona wear and do, and where they go. Rainey even does the odd bit of DJing — "hip-hop and disco" — and once modelled on Rifat Ozbek's catwalk... Her T-shirt, printed with a newspaper headline — "Prince of Pop Andy Warhol dies in his sleep at 58" — has had the sleeves ripped off, and the seams are slashed. Below that, she is wearing tight denim knee-length "clam diggers" with a fuchsia floral sarong tied over the top (and yes it looks cool). She offers me tea in a cracked metallic mug, removing a Union Jack tracksuit top so I can put the hot tea down on the floor.

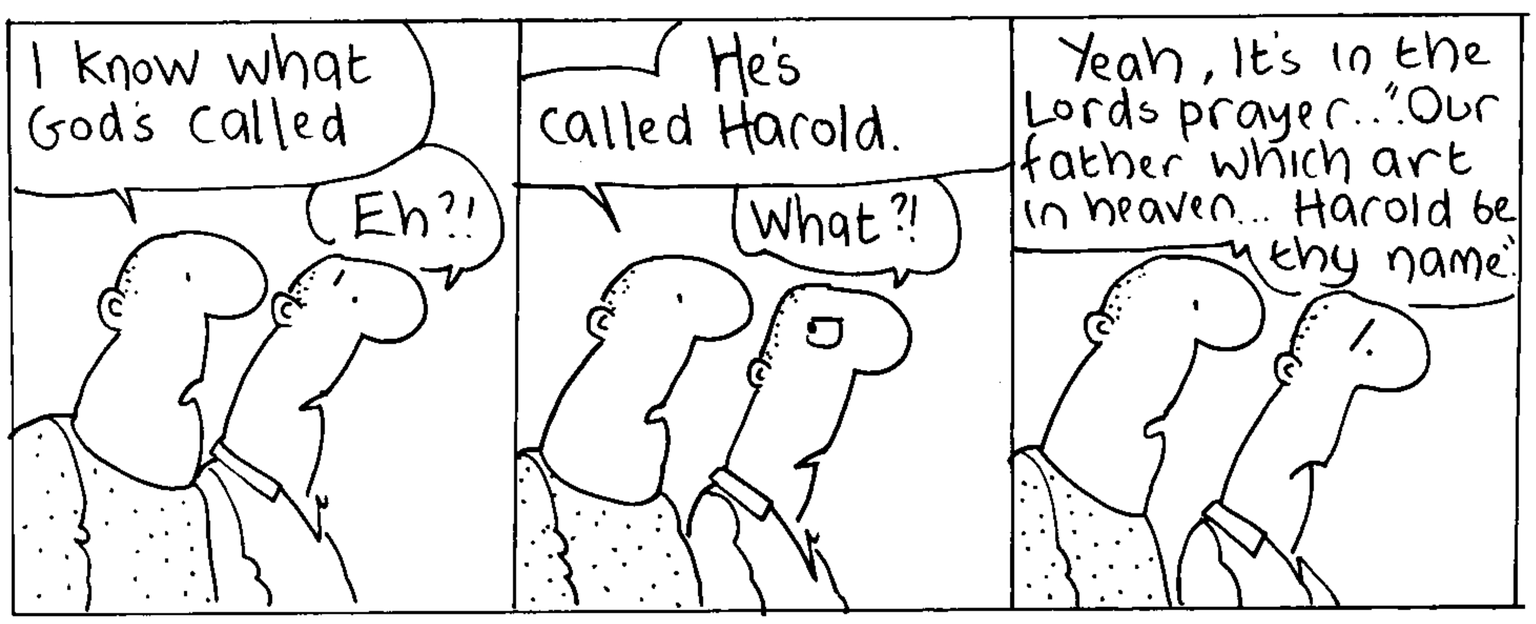
ANGELA BUTTOLPH (on Ramona Rainey)
Evening Standard

CONTRIBUTORS: Michael Carlson, Peter Brown, David Thompson, Kevin Cronin, E. Crawshaw.

£10 paid for entries



HUSBAND


I know what God's called
Eh?!
He's called Harold.
What?!
Yeah, It's in the Lords prayer..."Our father which art in heaven... Harold be thy name"

Letters

Deep meaning

Sir,

Your Diarist George Steiner (934), regales us with "the alertness of a lieder by Scubert" (sic). Is this the same Scubert who invented Scubert diving and went on to perfect underwater hang-gliding? A brief biography will be essential reading.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL BROOKE,
Irthlingborough, Northants.

Film rebuff

Sir,

No funding has ever, as Paul Foot implies, been made to any film project in Scotland as a result of "cosy" relationships. He chooses his words with lawyerly care, implying improper behaviour without actually alleging it. Thus he impugns a range of people in an exotic conspiracy which does not, did not and could not exist. A panel of local film makers, a board of national film and television practitioners, senior civil servants and the staff of these organisations are all smeared by this carefully constructed semi-allegation which carries no scintilla of truth.

Furthermore, the announcement of my resignation from Scottish Screen had nothing to do with the "Scottish Stand" organisation ("probably", wrote Foot again with lawyerly care) since it had been indicated to the previous arts minister and to colleagues several months before "Scottish Stand" existed. I am leaving for the reasons stated: six years at any quango is quite enough and demands of work elsewhere were pressing.

Foot also wrote that this year's Cannes film festival was attended by "at least 20 top people in the Scottish film industry..." Three people — not 20 — were paid for by Scottish Screen and worked to market, develop, represent and advance a record number of Scottish films. Others, including myself, paid their own way or attended on behalf of employers, six from public bodies. These facts were reported by Scottish arts minister Sam Galbraith to the House of Commons on 4 June.

Working at the world's pre-eminent marketplace for films is no "freebie" and meetings with buyers, exhibitors, distributors, funders and international film executives at a single venue in a short time-frame is surely more cost effective than travelling to these people in dozens of different parts of the world.

Yours faithfully,
ALLAN SHIACH,
Chairman, Scottish Screen.

Sue, grabbit and run-and-run

Sir,

In issue 934, the Books & Bookmen section contains a piece about my lawsuit against Smith Gryphon. Whoever your informant was has misled you, and I would be most grateful if you could set the record straight by publishing this letter or an addendum to the piece with the following information in it.

I am not threatening to sue. The writ was issued some time ago. It is true that the disputed sum is £340,000, but untrue that Smith Gryphon's counterclaim exceeds that. On the contrary, their claims, spurious as they are, are significantly smaller.

You are quite right to ask: Where will it all end? The police are investigating and I have had to make reports to both the Law Society and the Institute of Chartered Accountants. Smith Gryphon went into voluntary receivership the day after our mutual bankers informed them that I had requested statements of our account. All of this is a matter of fact and record. I even have a letter of apology from the banker who tipped Smith Gryphon off to prove it.

Yours faithfully,
LADY COLIN CAMPBELL,
London.

Lookalike

Madame Moitessier

Bragg

Sir,

Can there be French blood in the veins of Melvyn Bragg?

Yours faithfully,
MRS E. HEWISON,
London SW20.

Finding faults

Sir,

Re: John Row's letter in response to your article on Ernst & Young. I agree that NHS equipment purchases should be exempt from VAT; indeed, all purchases by public sector bodies should be exempt from all taxes. The present anomalous legislation is the fault of the previous government and I hope that the new one will reform it.

However, his statement "It is difficult to fault Ernst & Young..." is of unclear meaning and likely to give a false impression. If by "fault Ernst & Young" he means "find some law which Ernst & Young have broken" he is right; but that is not the meaning which I or, I suspect, most people would attach to the expression.

Ernst & Young have used a legal loophole to syphon public money off into their own pockets. Their effect on the public has been similar to that of a gang of bandits raiding a post office.

Yours sincerely,
THOMAS H. APPLEBY,
(Not an accountant either, just a poor taxpayer)
Sale, Cheshire.

Lookalike

Sir,

While browsing through a Littlewoods' mail-order catalogue the other day, I came across an almost-identical version of the celebrated £2,000 dress worn by Ms Ffion Jenkins at a Torny Conference cocktail party. The catalogue dress is priced at £35.

Does the Tory leader share his future wife's lavish shopping habits? I think we should be told.

ANNIE GELLY,
London SE24.

Pew! What a trend

Sir,

Piloti's note in EYE *931 gives views of worrying trends in church behaviour. It is however easier to see that dozing off will be much easier in Ecclesall Church. In this affluent suburb of Sheffield it is a pity that similar funds cannot be raised to assist the council library a few yards away.*

But perhaps the "Eccleshall outside Sheffield" referred to is the one in Cheshire. One assumes the glossy leaflet got it right or the funds may end up in the wrong place.

The Ecclesall referred to by Piloti has no "h" and far from being outside Sheffield is very much inside it. As the township of Ecclesall it merged with the township of Sheffield in the 1890s to form the city of the latter name.

Kind regards,
J.B. SMITH,
Virginia Water, Surrey.

Kiss and Tellytubby

Sir,

Your last two Luvvies columns have featured the "exaggerated" responses of "actor" Dave Thompson regarding his sacking from the role of Tinky Winky in the BBC's TELETUBBIES.

Am I the first reader to point out that Mr Thompson has been a stand-up comedian on the London circuit for a number of years now, and that his comments have undoubtedly been made with his tongue lodged firmly in his cheek?

I just wanted you to avoid the embarrassment of putting him in for a third week.

ANDREW McINTOSH,
Dublin.

Purely academic

Sir,

Street of Shame (932) accurately recorded the fact that my colleague Bob Bayliss and I were fired after serving many years on the SUNDAY MIRROR.

In keeping with the laudable aims of David Montgomery's Academy of Excellence, which cites accuracy and communication as two principal objectives, I wonder if I may correct you on three points.

1. Neither Bob nor I expressed any doubts about Mr Montgomery's academy. We wrote to him, at the request of the chapel, seeking communication and accurate information about the academy and what exactly it entailed.

A polite and not unreasonable request, you may think, which has never received a reply.

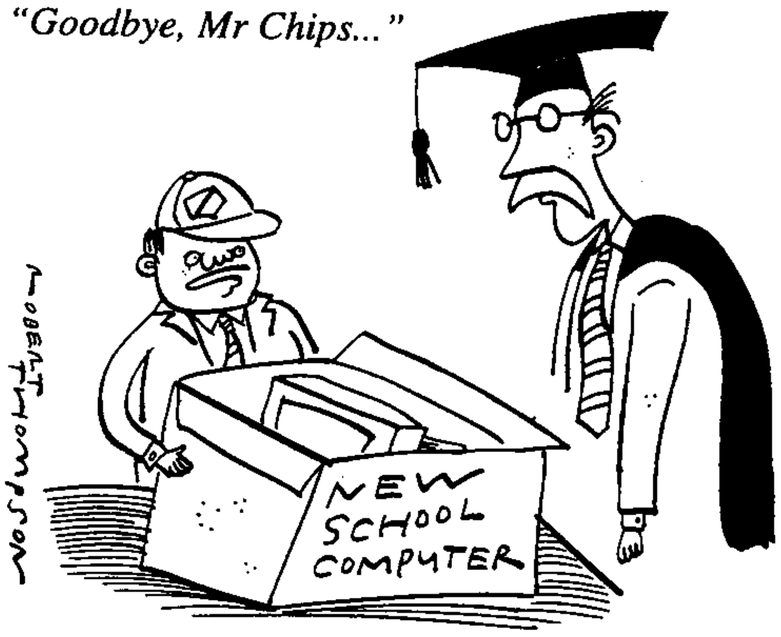
2. I was not told by editor Bridget Rowe that my sacking was as a "result of restructuring" in the editorial department.

3. The SUNDAY MIRROR *chapel is not an NUJ chapel but seeks to represent both NUJ and BAJ (British Association of Journalists) members as well as the few who do not belong to either organisation.*

It was always a moderate chapel while I was FoC and saw nothing wrong in being polite and courteous — two other laudable objectives.

Sincerely,
ANDREW GOLDEN,
(Former FoC Sunday Mirror Journalists' Chapel), London W9.

"Goodbye, Mr Chips..."



I-SPY *Karistos, Greece*

Submitted by R.W. Strutt. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Harpie-ing on

Sir,

PRIVATE EYE*'s passion for accuracy continues to impress. In describing "the tide of print" about single women (Girl Trouble, Literary Review Girl, 3 October), you include my novel,* THE TROUBLE WITH SINGLE WOMEN *(published by Macmillan on 10 October, price £9.99). "The essence of all these books is the same," you write. The women "...just want great sex, great jobs — oh, and Mr Right..." The question stitching all these novels together is, according to you, "Where are all the decent men?".*

In my novel, the "new spinster" refuses marriage, resigns from her job, positively rejects Mr Right (and, for that matter, Mr Wrong) and never discusses her sexual aspirations — great, modest or otherwise. What's more, there ain't no traditional happy ever after.

You write, "It doesn't take a literary historian... to establish that this kind of thing is a century old. The 'superfluous female' of the Victorian census return was a stock figure of the late Victorian novel..." The difference between then and now is fundamental. Then, the Victorian single woman couldn't even begin to provide for herself the range of choices available to today's spinster. Now, a single woman can give herself anything a husband once provided — income, status, home. Consequently, the value of a husband has been radically reappraised.

You describe me as a "veteran trend chaser". Veteran, yes. Trend chaser? The book was begun four years ago, completed a year ago. perhaps it's not so much trend chasing as reflecting life in a different kind of world from the one you lads appear to inhabit? My next novel is about a nine year old English girl in Pakistan in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis. It's about class and childhood and Empire and the corrupt side of British national identity. There's got to be a trend in there somewhere.

Yours,
YVONNE ROBERTS,
London SW12.

Incomparable

Sir,

"It's hard to imagine anyone nastier than child murderer Myra Hindley..." begins "Ena B. Wandsworth" of Canary Wharf (Letters, EYE *934). Too right; so what, then, was the point of "her" unpleasant Hindley/Boris Johnson lookalike? It certainly couldn't have been humour, could it? (Hindley is not, nor ever will be, a laughing matter.) Nor, it has to be said, is there any great resemblance between Johnson and Hindley. In fact, it seems an odd thing in any case to want to draw attention to a perceived similarity between them: I do hope "Ena" was not acting out of malice towards Johnson...*

Even if it wasn't meant maliciously, the lookalike was still unnecessary, tasteless and unfair. It amounted to an insult which Johnson, whatever one might think of his journalism and/or Tory views, most definitely did not deserve.

Best wishes,
MATTHEW KEUTENIUS,
Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey.

Never say 'Di'

Sir,

Oooooooooh. La-di-da.

Contrary to what was implied in your last edition, the August/September issue of VIZ ***was*** *withdrawn from sale in an overwhelming and spontaneous display of people power by our respectable publisher John Brown and those noble porn merchants W.H. Smith. It was subsequently reprinted and redistributed minus what I can only describe as the most unfortunate and regrettable references to the late Diana, Princess of Wales.*

There's no point you lot continuing to moan on about lost print runs and trying to blame distributors and newsagents for your own failings. Resistance is futile. Why not simply accept the inevitable truth — that Diana was a saint — and adjust your editorial accordingly. You'll feel much better afterwards.

Yours,
CHRIS DONALD,
Editor, Viz.

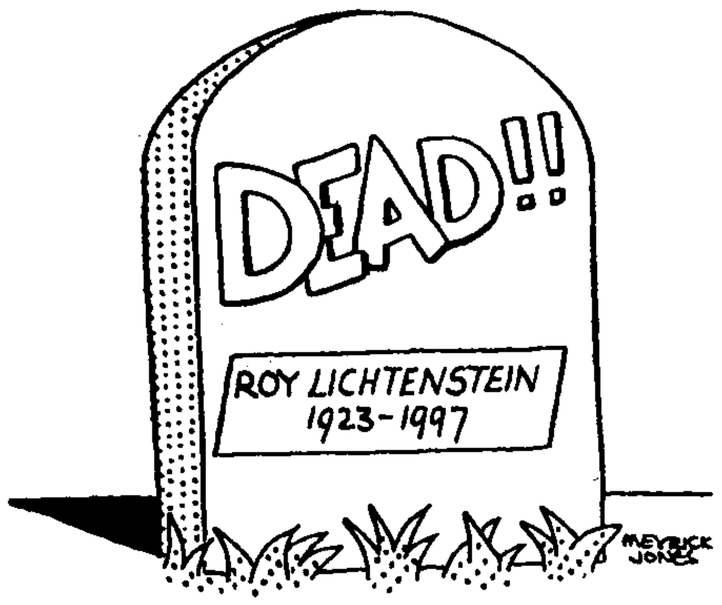
Sir,

I am writing in response to an article (934) suggesting that we did not show our respect for Princess Diana.

Yes, we were open throughout the funeral. The television was turned on for the benefit of any members that were unable to view the broadcast elsewhere or felt they needed company at that time. However, it was far from "business as usual". The bar, snooker room and other facilities were closed and when we opened at 1 o'clock I and the staff were wearing black ties.

If people feel they have to criticise they should get their facts right. Having been so quick in your criticism will you now be as quick to apologise.

Yours faithfully,
M.K. HAMMERTON,
Chairman, Colchester and District Conservative and Unionist Club Ltd.



Preaching to the converted

Sir,

At the risk of being pedantic about a cartoon (934), may I just make the following points:

a) Mithraism was a soldiers' religion (brought to Britain by the Roman Legions).

b) It was a secret society. Converts weren't supposed to say anything about what went on in their rituals and they certainly wouldn't go around preaching about it.

c) It was an exclusively male religion. Women didn't get a look in.

Yours pedantically,
R.S. PYNE,
Ceredigion, Wales.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Here is Michael Johnson, the world champion, whose world record is not held by him but by Butch Reynolds."
DAVID COLEMAN, BBC
(Neil Thomas)

"It's become a fascinating duel between three men."
DAVID COLEMAN, BBC2
(Dave Brown)

"Leeds United are enjoying more of the possession now that they have the ball."
SIMON BROTHERTON, Radio 5 Live
(Karen Howes)

"It's nice to see so many umbrellas here in spite of the rain."
RICHARD KEYES, Sky Sports
(Peter Gale)

Presenter: *Your new book is called 'Glenn Hoddle: The Man and the Manager' — now what's it all about?*
Guest: *Glenn Hoddle.*
'Under The Moon'
(R. Perrin)

O·B·N

A friend of mine recalls how she once sat next to a bloke at a party who suddenly clutched his head in his hands. She asked him what the matter was. "I've just realised that I'm never going to be Martin Amis," he sobbed. (Tell this story to women and they laugh out loud; tell it to men and they smile ruefully.)

ALLISON PEARSON interviews Martin Amis, Saturday Telegraph.

(The entire interview was entered for this column by innumerable kind readers, but there are constraints on space even for this quality of OBN.)

£10 paid for all entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

HOM SAP BY DAVID AUSTIN

CAESAR, YOU LOOK VERY UNHAPPY. DO YOU WANT TO TALK?
SIGN
SOMETIMES THERE'S A LOT TO BE GAINED FROM IT.
HOLD THE FRONT PAGE.
MY GAY SEX AGONY BY CAESAR
SOL

FUNNY OLD WORLD

O "Yes, the veterinarian told me to be careful with the drug," Stephen Charles admitted to nurses at Georgetown City Hospital, Guyana. "He told me that when he gives Cantarden to stud horses to improve their mating prowess, he only puts a single drop into a bucket of water mixed with molasses. But I wanted quick results, so I drank the entire bottle, and this is the consequence."

Charles, 42, was explaining the circumstances that had led to his medical difficulties. "A month ago, I became friendly with a seventeen-year-old girl from Essiquibo Island, but every time we made love the freshie complained that I was ejaculating coming too quick and that she didn't 'want a marshmallow stuck in her coin slot'. I tried everything - Stone, Brush, Supersex - without success. But then a friend told me that they use Cantarden in his stable, and arranged for me to get a bottle.

"The good news was that the drug worked, and I got a dongle so huge you wanted to salute it. The bad news was that the girl didn't turn up for our meeting that night. And the really bad news was that my erection wouldn't go down. It ached, it got sore, and I couldn't piss. Relaxing the man's way made no difference. After three days, I realised I might get gangrene, so I came to the hospital. They packed it with ice, but I've been here for almost three weeks, and it still hasn't gone down. The worst thing is when I'm sleeping. Female nurses come and lift my bedsheet, then run away giggling. I know they're calling me 'the staff sergeant' but it's no laughing matter." *(The Voice [St Lucia] 14/6/97. Spotter: C. M. Evans)*

—O—

O "We hold the view that George Steven Cook is not a fit and proper person to hold firearms," Detective Sergeant Rob Nicholl told the Greymouth District Court. "But it's not his claim that he comes from outer space that really concerns us. It's more his boast that he'll 'shoot it out' with the police if we ever come near his house."

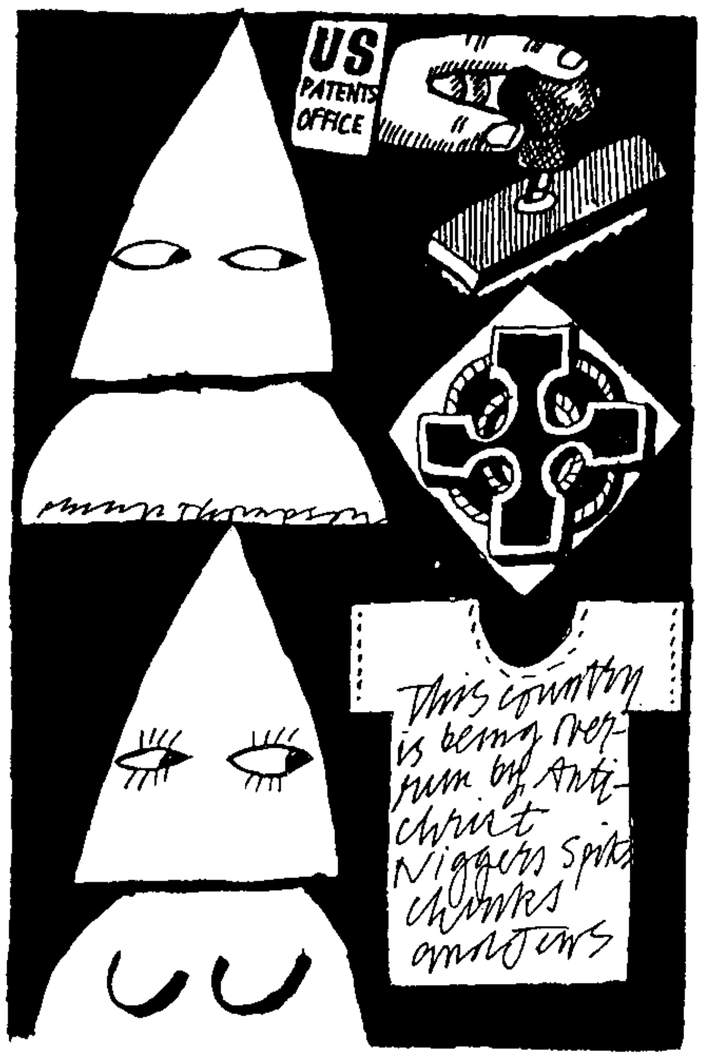
Earlier Cook, a 79-year-old farmer from Hokitika, had explained to Judge Stephen Erber why he wanted a firearms licence. "My grandmother was part aborigine and she was impregnated by aliens who arrived in the Australian outback from space in the last century. It happened to a lot of aboriginal women in those days. When I was 22, a doctor examined me and said 'where are you from? You're not one of us' so it must be true. Recently, another doctor said I was only twelve, so there's got to be something in it. Yes, I told the police that we should have guns on our hips and shoot it out like they did in the old west, but I only said it because I'd run out of swear words.

"I am a kind man. I have raped in the past, but that's all behind me now. I need the guns to shoot rabbits."

Cook was granted a firearms licence. *(Sunday Star-Times [New Zealand] 24/8/97. Spotter: Craig Harrison)*

—O—

O *"There's a lot of wackos out there that call themselves Klansmen," Rachel Pendergraft, spokeswoman for the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Harrison, Arkansas told reporters. "That's why the Knights have decided to apply to*

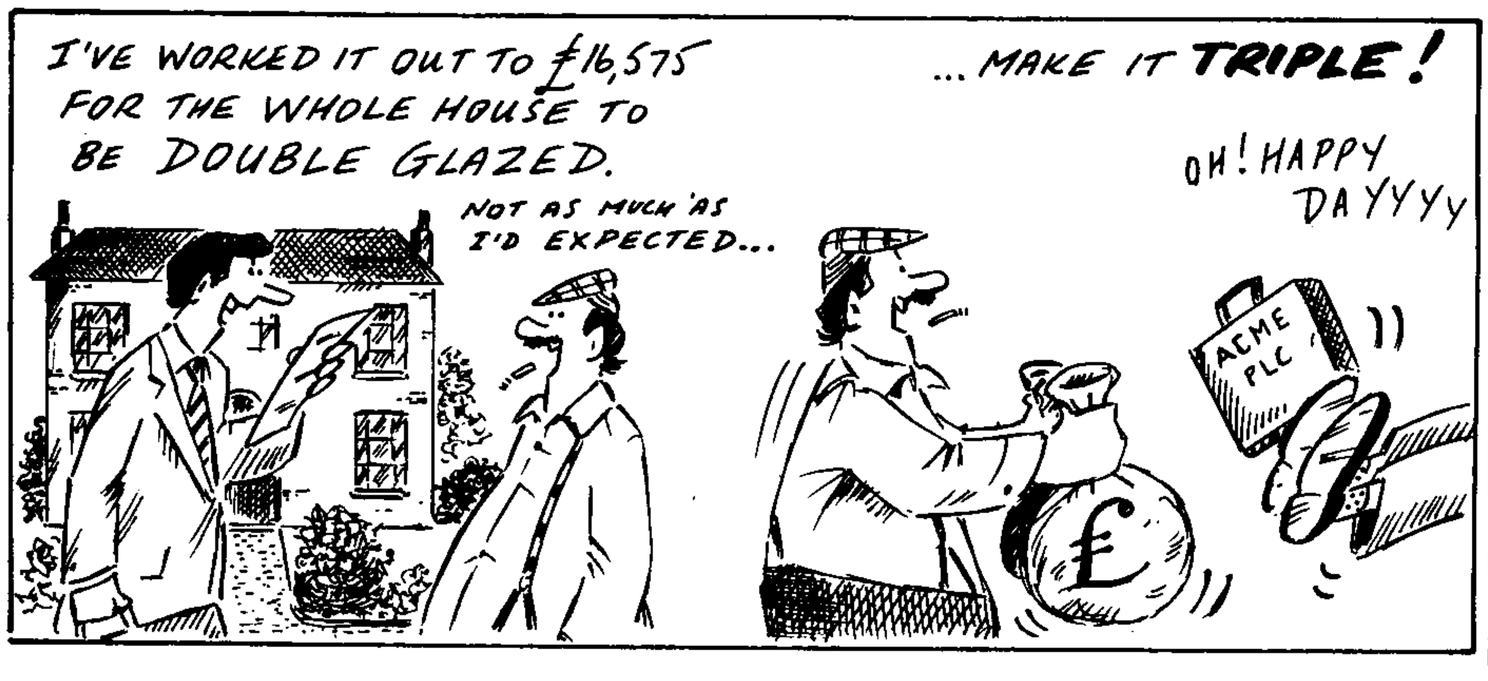


the US Patent and Trademark Office for protection of our official logo, a white diamond and Celtic cross designed by Thom Robb, our leader. That way, customers can be certain they're buying genuine Klan merchandise, like this T-shirt with the message 'this country is being overrun by anti-Christ Niggers, Spics, Chinks and Jews', and not fakes made by unsavory rivals." (Arkansas Herald, 28 July 1997. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

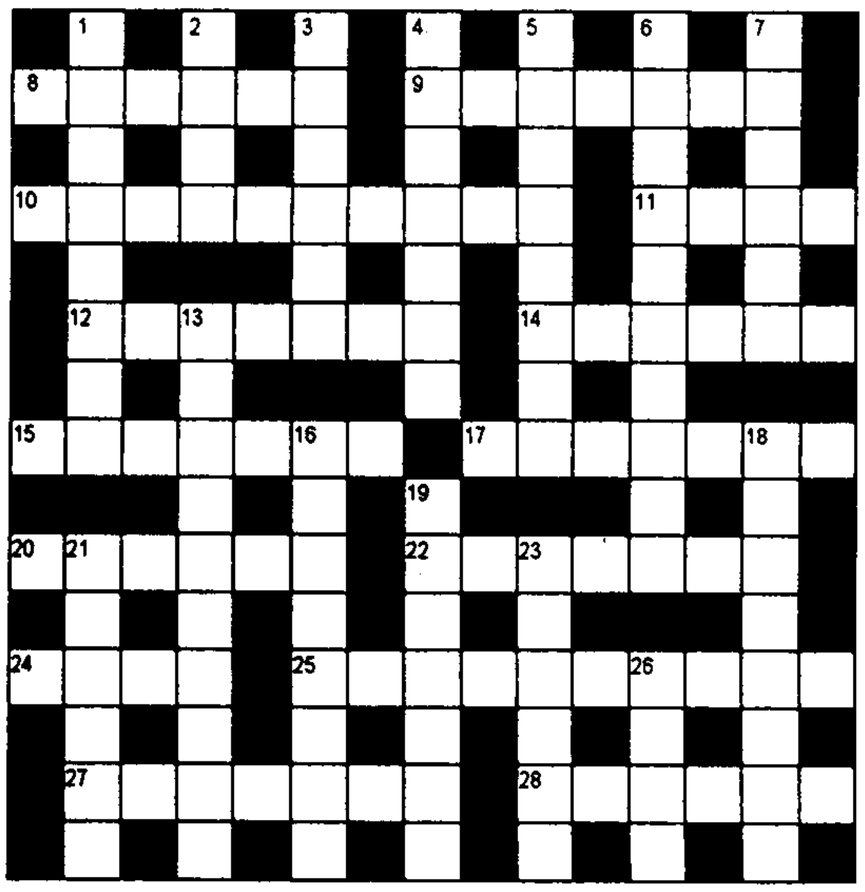
The Lottery Winners

TURNER


I'VE WORKED IT OUT TO £16,575 FOR THE WHOLE HOUSE TO BE DOUBLE GLAZED.
NOT AS MUCH AS I'D EXPECTED...
...MAKE IT TRIPLE!
OH! HAPPY DAYYYy
ACME PLC
£

EYE CROSSWORD 90

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

8 Ineffectual type, but he's no plonker (6)
9 Old ready to get pisspoor *Sun* involved with age issues initially (7)
10/18 The systematic bad-mouthing of someone on the quiet? (10, 8)
11 A bit of a poseur — only has new money (4)
12 Fergie, some geezer's beloved missus? (7)
14 Frottage is totally — well, somewhat — unfair to the elderly (6)
15 Our Dave's one for being self-denying (7)
17 Finding, right, end's come off knob, get the beastly doctor round (7)
20 Pass round *Sun* — sadly, it's representative of our country (6)
22 Best needs brief surgery to have flipping sex with the old woman! (7)
24 Phoney mop cleaner — no shit! (4)
25 Relative to some, we hear, orgasm is a let-down (10)
27 Old banger maybe gets some stick, but a boon for TV newsreaders (7)
28 A guy likely to engender a burning desire in us? (6)

DOWN

1 Shut your mouth about hack being kept in the dark (6,2)
2 Bottle rips out the inside (4)
3 Lecherously give someone this prestigious organ! (3,3)
4 Contra picks up model after one (7)
5 Late royal's elevated, glorified state a cause for reproach? (8)
6 Opportunity for all the electorate to vote — but obviously not for this party! (10)
7 'Two egos' Ross, transmogrified into a god! (6)
13 Minister's in terrible shit — pointless schism with Right (5,5)
16 The two Davids' coming together — amorous carry-on without giving head (8)
18 (see 10)
19 Blokes loyal to old Labour leader who service Brenda? (7)
21 Wilson, Heath feeling quite randy between them (2,4)
23 Blood-sucker Brenda's heart (6)
26 Flash (not Jack) is doubtful (4)

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24.10.97. Entries to "Crossword", Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 89

Winner: R. HUNT

ACROSS: 5 Blue chip 7 Orgasm 10/15 Right Honourable 11 Showdown 12 Essex man 14 Filthy 16 Yobs 18 S and M 20 Tony 21 Attila 23 True blue 25 Fitted up 28/17 Tilda Swinton 29/22 Prince Andrew 30 Moonwalk.

DOWN: 1 Clare Short 2 The Times 3 Opus 4 Sod off 6 Eagle 8 God slot 9 Sow 13 Nonet 15 (see 10) 17 (see 28) 19 Mountjoy 22 (see 29) 24 Below 26 IMRO 27 Pimp.

THE SUN SAYS
We thrashed 'em!

NO wonder the Eyeties are weeping into their pizzas! Our lionhearted lads gave them some good old English stick in the eternal stadium!

Beckham, Batty and Ince had the wops waving the white flag and retreating just like they did in the days of Mussolini!

They say Rome wasn't built in a day — but we knocked down what there was in 90 glorious minutes!

What a victory! What a triumph! Let's hear the score again!

Italy 0 England 0

Doesn't it make you proud to be a Sun reader?

ON OTHER PAGES: top sports commentary from

● *David Mellor* ● *Melinda Messenger* ● *David Messenger* ● *Melinda Mellor* ● *Mellora Davinger* **(That's enough. Ed.)**

The Slaughter On The Spanish Steps

by Sun reporter **Dave Drunk**

THERE I was in Rome innocently admiring the Uffizi Gallery with its world-famous pictures of the Mona Lisa when this Italian policeman hits me over the head with his baton and throws me in the nick.

The next thing I know I am charged with indecent behaviour in a fountain and sent home in disgrace.

WOP A Scandal! Send us your own stories of cowardly carabinieri cruelty and you could win a crate of lager and a ticket to the World Cup in France where you get a free seat to throw at the garlic-guzzling frogs!

Plus Free CD of England's World Cup 1998 Theme Song "Three Yobs in a Fountain".

TALES FROM THE BIBLE

The Conversion of St Paultillo

THERE WAS a young man in those days called Saultillo who persecuted those who were not like himself and failed to believe the orthodox religion of the time. No one was more dutiful than Saultillo in worshipping the Goddess (Thatchahweh) and smiting her enemies.

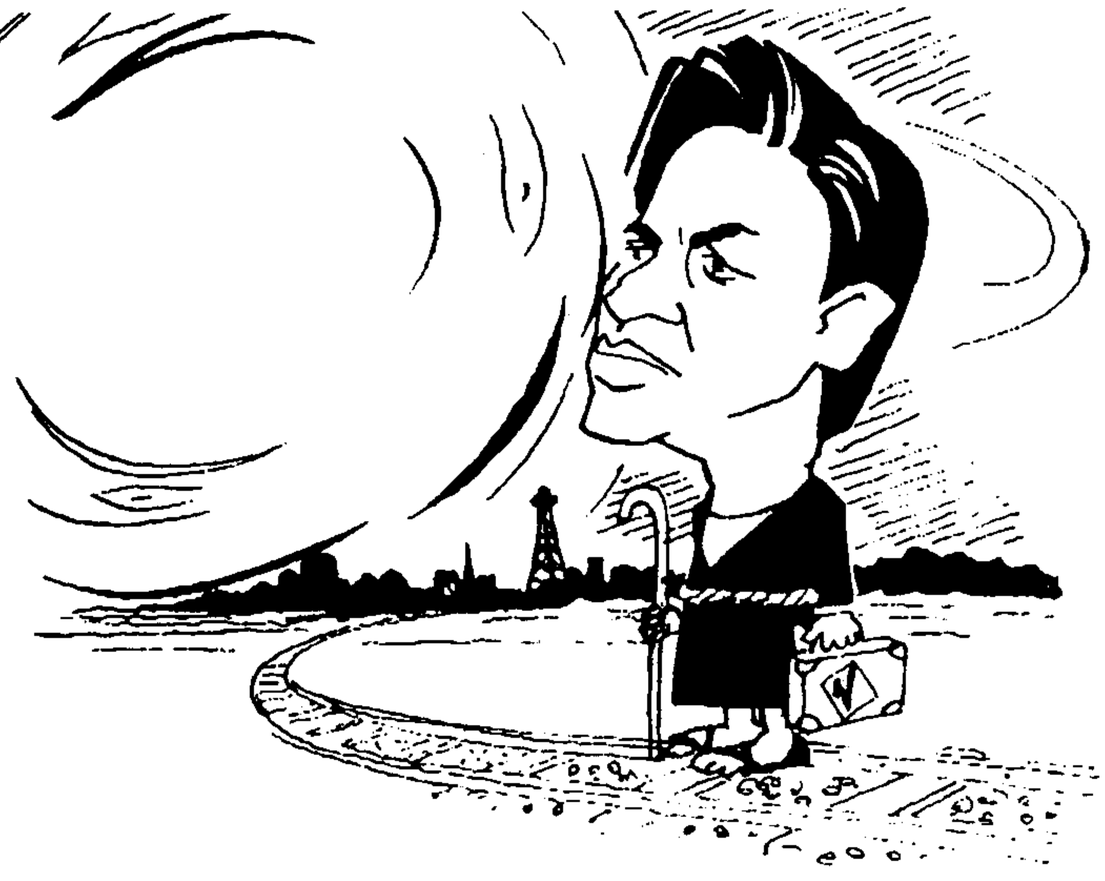
Then one day Saultillo was travelling to Blackpool on an Virgin Train which had stopped for several hours due to a shortage of drivers, carriages, trains, etc, after the recent privatisation.

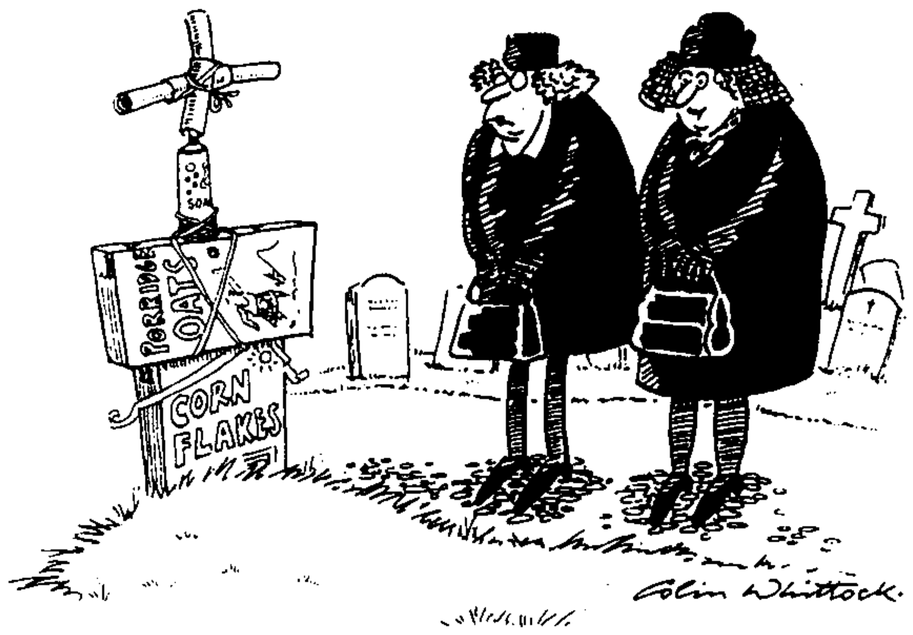
And suddenly lo! there was a blinding flash and a voice said over the tannoy: "Saultillo! Saultillo! If you want to be the next Tory leader you'll have to stop persecuting people and change your tune, matey!"

Saultillo then opened his eyes with a jerk (William Hague) and found that he was still in Crewe.

And from that day forward Paultillo, as he became known, worked tirelessly on behalf of himself spreading the new message — "Vote For Paultillo".

NEXT WEEK: St Glenn of Hoddle (The Conversion of the Eleven Useless Men)





"He adored 'Blue Peter'..."

GLENDA SLAGG

On tour with Her Majesty The Queen

FOR cryin' out loud Ma'am — put a sock in it!?! Geddit!! Gawd help us?! What is the world coming to when the British Queen cannot afford a pair of shoes?! OK, the Monarchy needs to cut down on its expenses but you would have thought they could have run to a pair of shoes?!! Even a pair of trainers from Woolies would do!? Come on Phil! Put your hand in your pocket and fork out for the Missis!? We can't have all those Indians and Pakistanis a-sniggering up their saris whilst the Queen goes walkabout looking like a bag lady!?! Blimey!! Bring back Diana!?! *(You're fired. Ed.)*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Well, what a trip! Our parish outing to Brighton was an unqualified success, just as I said it would be!

Congratulations to all those who put in so much work behind the scenes to make it such a triumph!

Not that we were being triumphant about all that we've achieved in the last few months (even if we had good cause to be!).

The keynote, as I made clear in my "sermon-on-the-beach"(!) was "humility, humility, humility"!

And I think we can be very proud of the degree of humility we all achieved! Well done, everyone!

For the benefit of all those who couldn't make it to the seaside, for reasons best known to themselves (And they'd better be good ones. PM), let me recap on some of the areas we focused on in my sermon.

Firstly, compassion. As I said, we are compassionate. But compassion on its own is not enough!

To be of any value, compassion needs to be hard-edged, and that means sometimes seeming to be pretty hard-hearted and ruthless! Even though we are not!

Look! The good Samaritan didn't just hand out money to the man lying on the road!

He made sure that the man was not malingering, was genuinely a deserving case and, what is more, would do everything he could to pay back the money for his treatment when he was back on his feet *(New Labour Bible, Book of Tebbit, Ch.4, vv.7-12)*.

Secondly, giving. As I said at Brighton, the mood of today is one of giving. That's why I called it "The Age of Giving".

But don't worry! I'm not talking about people having to give more of their hard-earned money in the collection plate! No, I mean we all have to give more of ourselves, in a general sense. You won't be worse off! I "give" you my word!

Finally, modernity. It's all very well dwelling in the past, like some of the senior citizens who came on the trip and told us a lot about how good things were in the old days.

But what they have to realise is that the world has moved on, and sadly no one is interested in what they have to say any more.

That's what I mean by compassion with a hard edge! So your "giving", ladies and gents, can be to "give it a rest"!

On a more serious note, why is it that there's always someone who tries to ruin things for everyone else?

We were all having a lovely day out when Mr Banks, who was sitting at the back of the coach, made a particularly tasteless joke which I won't repeat for obvious reasons!

None of us mind high spirits on a day out, and I like a joke as much as Mr Banks himself!

But I know when to draw the line, and hopefully so does he. I'm glad to say that Mr Banks has sent me the following unsolicited letter, after a word from Mr Mandelson:

"Dear Vicar,

I have been guilty of betraying your trust and of bringing St Albion's into disrepute through my silly and thoughtless remark about Mr Hague. I now beg forgiveness from you and all the congregation and I accept that if I step out of line again I will be out on my ear, which is what I would richly deserve.

Your humble penitent,

A. Banks."

So, that's that. I am prepared to forgive and forget *(Luke 14, 7-8)* providing that Mr Banks remembers that from now on he is on probation.

Still, let's end on something positive with the wonderful victory of our footballers! I can't take any credit for it, obviously, but it is good to see a great team with a strong leader winning through again!!

Yours humbly,

Tony

Notices

- Focus Groups will meet on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Subjects to include:

- **Should women fight in the front line?**
- **Should the age of homosexual consent be lowered?**
- **Should girls be allowed to box?**
- **Isn't Tony wonderful?**

A Note From Our Churchwarden (Mr Mandelson)

May I thank all those who voted for me in the elections for the Domestic Steering Group of the PCC. I greatly appreciated their support, even though it was not enough to beat Mr Livingstone. I would like to make it clear that I am not in the least bit disappointed by this result, however disappointing it may be. It is always good for any of us to receive a lesson in humility, and in my own case it has taught me that I really am too senior a figure in the Church to waste my valuable time on this silly little committee.

PM. (Quite right! TB)

New chorus for use in next Sunday's Family Service, written by a local poet.

Tony is our beacon, shining in the dark,
Tony is our beacon, shining in the dark,
Tony is our beacon, shining in the dark,
Shine, Tony, shine *(repeat)*

Music by A. Blair
Words by P. Mandelson

X X X *Thank you,* X X X *thank you, thank you*

A big thank you to **Mr Gates**, who runs the Computers 'Я' Me shop in the High Street. Last week he dropped into the vicarage to explain how his computers could be used to open up an exciting new world of learning experiences for the kids at St Albion's Primary School. Some of this year's tombola money will go towards an "Internet Link-Up" Modem for Class 6. (Hope I've got this right, Bill!)

www.tony&stalbions.co.uk

Members of the St Albion's Amateur Dramatic Society meeting last week to plan the forthcoming production of Camelot. Mr Mandelson is on the right.

The Daily Telegraffion

FINAL **Britain's biggest-selling quality daily** Friday, October 17, 1997 **45p**

Ffew! What A Tory!

by Our Political Staff Charles Phworr

TOP Conservative Ffion Jenkins today showed off her beautiful new fiancé Mr William Hhaaag to a rapturous Blackpool audience.

Miss Jenkins, who has united the party with her radical new dress, today outlined her vision of a new style of conservatism — young, modern and attractive. But this message, worthy as it is, has been overshadowed by her stunning new partner who has dazzled the Tory Die-Hards with his glamorous suits and upmarket sex appeal.

The Daily Telegraffion

Mr Hague's Good Start

MR WILLIAM Hague, in his first conference as Conservative leader, has firmly established himself as the guardian of genuine Conservatism. In his several speeches he repeatedly spelled out the same message, and it was one with which no traditional Tory could possibly disagree. The party, he said, must put the past behind it, and look to the future. Above all, he said, the Conservative Party must be popular. It must be modern-minded, attuned to the needs of today's world and also tomorrow's, rather than those of yesterday. Nothing was to be gained, he went on, by refighting the battles of the past. The party must above all be united.

The Conservative Party, Mr Hague emphasised, must appeal to all sections of the community — black people, young people, female people, disabled people, gay people, Village People, Pan's People, M. People, Sunday People, the People's People.

In a phrase which will often be quoted again, he told his followers: "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world, and that has to be our watchword if we are to be the popular, united, modern party that is going to lose the next election".

© *Charles Moore, Age 97.*

Hague wows Conference with See-Through Address

by Our Fashion Staff Alexandra Dulman

MR WILLIAM Hague delighted supporters when he turned up at Blackpool with a flimsy speech, which everyone could see through and which left nothing to the imagination.

Inside

Pictures of that £2,000 address **8-11**

Is Ffion Britain's new Liz Hurley? (No) **9**

The Ffion phenomenon by Ffrank Johnson **10**

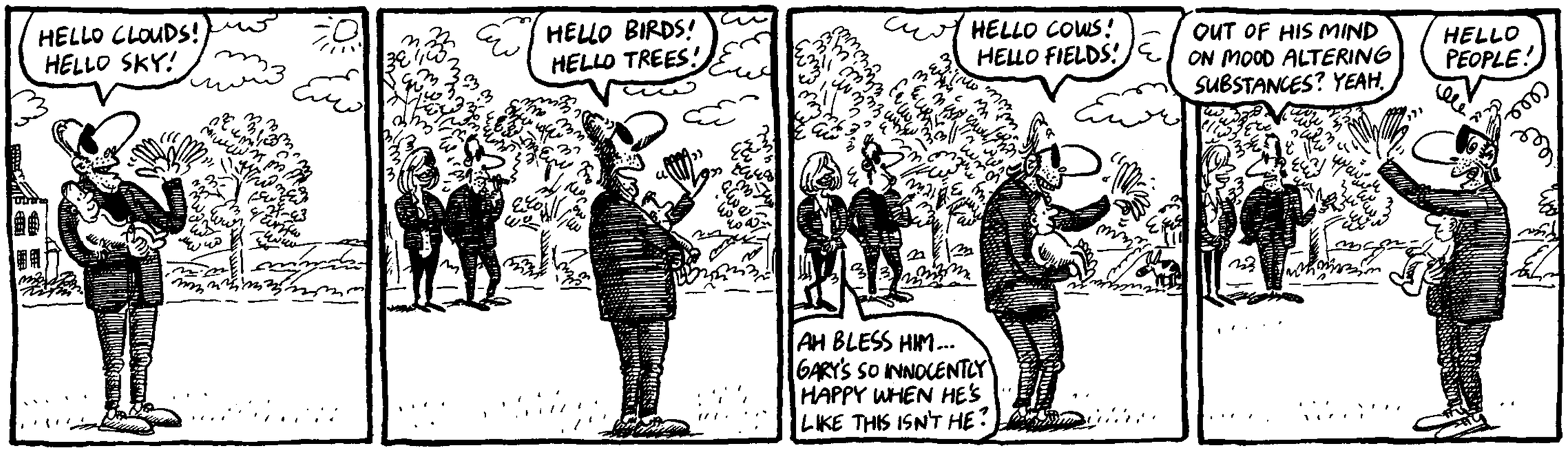
Why I love Ffancy Ffion by Ppaul Johnson **11**

Bboris Johnson explains how he'd like to give Ffion a Ff *(That's enough Ffilth. Ed)*

Late News — Tory Party Falls Apart *(Reuters)*

Celeb

LIGGER


HELLO CLOUDS! HELLO SKY!
HELLO BIRDS! HELLO TREES!
HELLO COWS! HELLO FIELDS!
AH BLESS HIM... GARY'S SO INNOCENTLY HAPPY WHEN HE'S LIKE THIS ISN'T HE?
OUT OF HIS MIND ON MOOD ALTERING SUBSTANCES? YEAH.
HELLO PEOPLE!

Diana's Lost Words

A further statement from Mohamed Al Cole, spokesperson to His Imperial Magnificence, the Fayed of Harrods

I AM authorised by His Holiness to hereby pronounce a *fatwa* on the following person — namely, Monsieur Thierry Meresse, the so-called director of the Paris Hospital where the late Princess of Fayed spent her final moments on earth.

M. Meresse has had the effrontery to deny my recent revelation to the world that the Princess gave a last private and confidential message to Nurse Nexiste-Pas of 47, Rue Imaginaire, to be conveyed to a person of great importance whose identity I cannot reveal because it was Her Majesty the Queen of England. But suffice it to say that this absolutely authentic and highly confidential message warned of the dangers of World War Three breaking out should Her Majesty not immediately use her Royal Prerogative to grant British Citizenship to a certain very important store owner in Knightsbridge.

When he made his denial of the existence of both this message and of Nurse Nexiste-Pas, I can categorically assure you that M. Meresse was completely and utterly drunk. Indeed, independent tests commissioned by the House of Fayed have shown that the level of alcohol in his blood was no less than three times that of the Ritz driver who smashed the Mercedes into the wall.

May I take this opportunity to remind customers that the Special Offer of Moroccan towels in Bathroom Requisites on the Sixth Floor has been extended for a further week as a mark of respect to myself.

M. COLE,
pp. Mohamed Al Fugged,
The Harrods House of Lies, London SW1.

DON'T CALL ME 'SIR SPIGGY' SAYS SIR SPIGGY

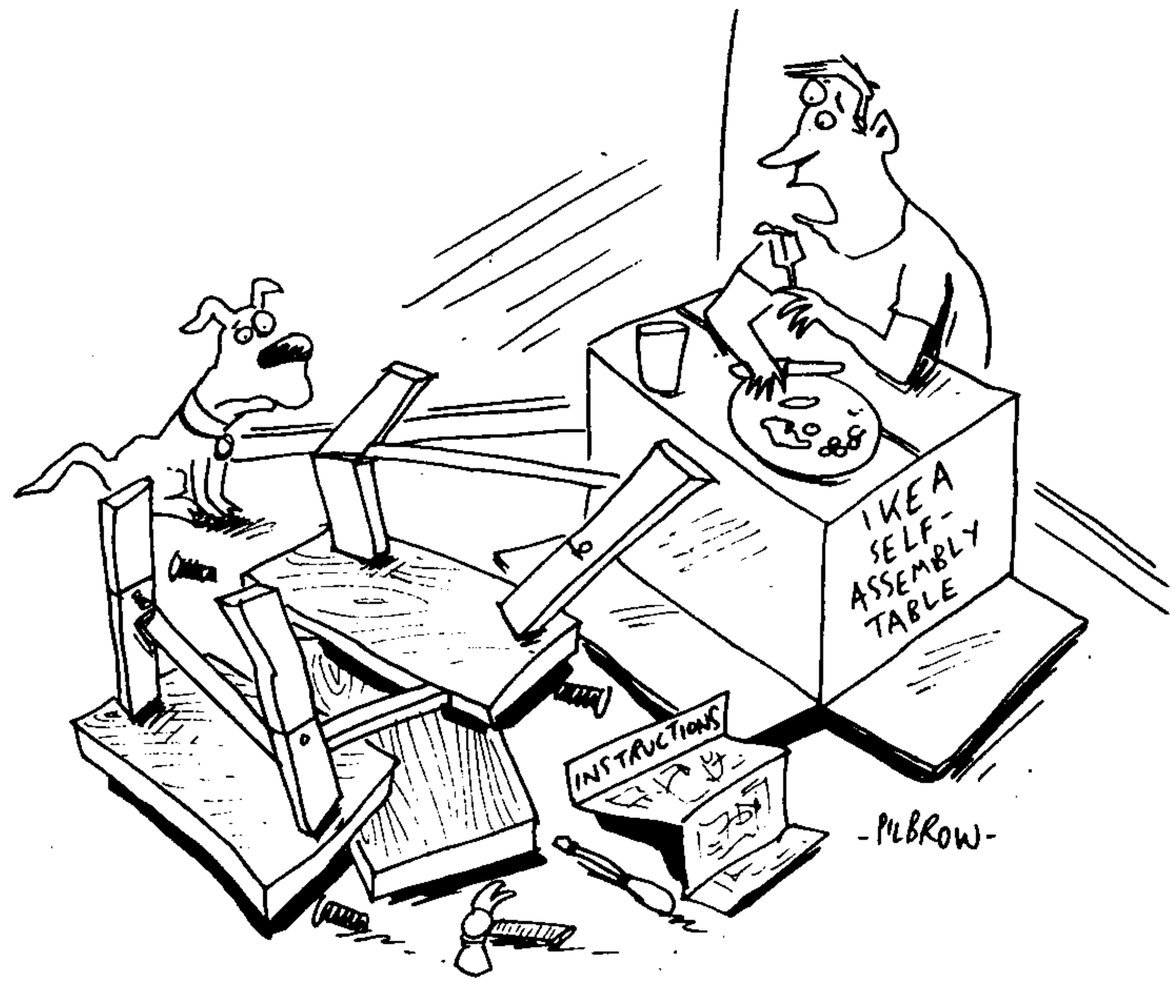
by Our Popular Music Staff **Lunchtime O'BEeze**

THE WORLD of pop music was rock and rolled to its foundations yesterday by the shock revelation that classical composer Sir Spigismond Topes, formerly lead singer of The Turds, is refusing to use notepaper designed by his wife, the Lady Vegeburga Topes (formerly Cindy Fruitcake) which bears the gilt letterhead "From The Desk of the Rt Hon Sir Spigismond of that Topes OBE".

Speaking at the Albert Hall premiere of his latest work, Sir Spiggy last night told reporters: "It's not that I've got anything against being called Sir Spiggy, but frankly I have been a simple Turd all my life and this is how I'd like to go down in history."

The 4,000 newsmen were then invited to listen to the first ever performance of Sir Spiggy's new 4-hour symphonic poem, "Standing Up Stoned" in E Minor, performed by the World Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Spigismond in person, with the assistance of Sir Andre Previn.

Sir Spigismond is 81.



CARRY ON DEEDES

Part 94 of our exclusive serialisation of the memoirs of the world's oldest "gentleman's gentleman"

OF ALL the gentlemen I have ever had the privilege to serve, Mr Macmillan was the most perfect gentleman.

I'll never forget the day he summoned me to his house in Downing Street. "Deedes," he said, in his aristocratic manner, "I want you to come and work for me."

I was naturally happy to oblige, even though he never told me what my job was supposed to be.

Of all the gentlemen I served, only one has ever complained. This was **Sir Anthony Eden.**

Once when he had put on a pair of bright yellow socks, I ventured a quiet word of caution.

"Ahem," I said, "if I may be allowed to comment on sir's selection of hosiery, possibly the canary hue is not entirely concomitant with the russet tweed of sir's plus fours."

Sir Anthony was so upset that he never spoke to me again.

Another gentleman for whom I worked for many years was **Lord Hartwell.** He was always kind and considerate, and my duties were never onerous.

It was therefore a very sad day for me when Lord Hartwell was forced to sell everything to a Canadian gentleman called **Mr Black.**

My new employer lost no time in informing me that he had appointed a **Mr Hitler Hastings** in my place.

Fortunately, Mr Hastings took pity on my position and called me into his sanctum.

"Deedes," he said, "I know you have served here for many decades. I have therefore fixed it with Mr Black that you can stay on and do odd jobs around the house."

"Thank you very much, sir," I said, and I am happy to say that many years later I am still on the staff at the age of 93. When I put it to Mrs Deedes that this might constitute something of a record, she suggested that I should write a letter about it to the Daily Telegraph.

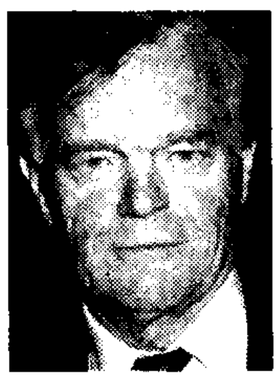
Taken from 'Upstairs, Downstairs — 80 Years In Service' by W.F. Deedes (Snipcock and Tweed, £49)

Three Taxi Drivers write

For the first time ever we invite no fewer than three prominent cab drivers to comment on all the important issues of the day.

'Normo' Tebbs (Cab No. 876) on the multi-cultural society

I've got nothing against them personally. Don't get me wrong. But if they come over here, they've got to learn our ways. They've got to assumulate... astimulate... assomol... you know, fit in. We've got our British culture which goes back thousands of years, football, EastEnders, Chris Evans, curry houses, Frank Bruno. And they've got to accept it, like everyone else. I mean, it's just like the poofs, isn't it? They're not the same as us, guv, are they? You know what I'd do with them? The blacks, the gays, the Asians, the Urdus. I'd send them back where they come from. It's the only language they understand, 'cos they certainly don't speak English, do they? Not like wot you and I can. I 'ad that Justin Fashanu in the back of the cab once. Very nicely spoken, 'e was. A proper gentleman.



'Al' Clark, (Saltwood Car Hire) on the Ulster Peace Process

Blimey, guv. You seen those talks they're still having in Northern Ireland? Waste of time, to my mind. Know what I'd do? Shoot the lot of them. Everyone knows who they are. They know where they live. They should go round in the middle of the night and string 'em up. That would be the end of it. I 'ad this Brigadier from the SAS in the back of the cab once. He showed me all their addresses. Very nice gentleman he was too. I gave him a whole book of receipts.

Tony 'Banksie' Banks (Cab No.472) on the Conservative Leadership

Seen that new bloke the Tories have got? I'll tell you what he looks like. One of them foetuses that haven't been born. I'll tell you another thing, guv. I bet some of them Tory MPs wish they'd voted in favour of abortion. See what I mean? Do you mind not smoking, guv? I've got a non-smoking policy in this cab. See the match? I missed it, I was too pissed. I 'ad that David Mellor in the back of the cab once. A real gentleman. A pleasure to drive around.

(That's enough cabbies. Ed.)

6.45 CONFERENCE TALK: LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CONFERENCE '97
The members of a primitive culture prepare to sacrifice Counsellor Troi. (641182)

Evening Herald (Dublin)

Sport
Bobby Charlton's Football crapbook: West Germany vs England, 1970
10pm, Thu, Sky Sports 3

Grauniad

BLAIR MEETS YELTSIN

ART WORLD ROCKED BY EARTHQUAKE TRAGEDY

by Our News Staff **Tremor Macdonald**

ART lovers were in shock yesterday at the terrible news that an earthquake had not hit the Royal Academy, not causing the destruction of the entire Saatchi collection of modern art.

"It is a tragedy of inconceivable proportions," said one expert. "All the works are intact. There are no cracks anywhere in the paintings. None of the sculptures have been buried under rubble and the building is still safe enough for people to go and see the Exhibition."

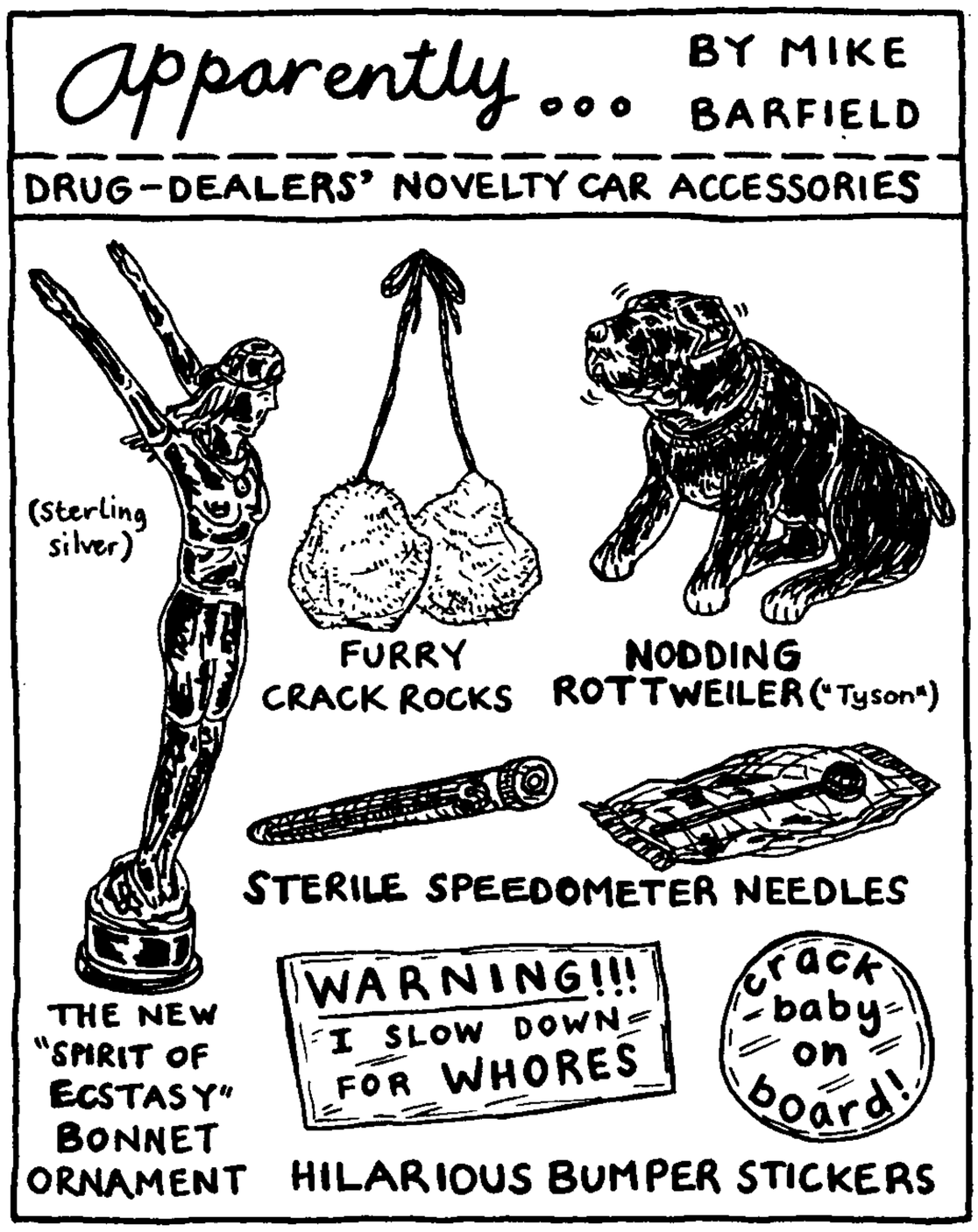
There are fears of no more earthquakes in the coming days with the possibility of seismic activity measuring 0 on the Richter Scale.

Not Worth A Giotto

Tourists are warned that in this event they should avoid the Royal Academy at all costs and travel to Italy instead.

"Assisi may be a pile of rubble," said a critic, "but it's a lot better than this disaster zone."

Cimabue is 757.



WHO'S REALLY WHO IN DANCE

● AN Eye guide to the most brilliant masterpiece of modern fiction ever to be adapted for television.

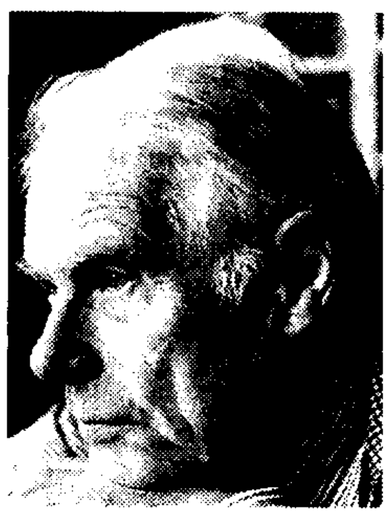
LET'S FACE THE MUSIC AND DANCE

by ENOCH POWELL
(pronounced "Tebbit")

COME Dancing is an epic novel in 94 volumes covering the years 1931-32. It has been described by its author Enoch Powell as "the greatest roman à fleuve ever written in any language in any century". Now Powell's classic work has been adapted for television in ten 4-hour episodes starting when the characters meet at Eton and continuing until they meet at Eton at an old boys' reunion.

● *Here then are the galaxy of larger-than-life characters who will spill out of your TV screens over the coming years to send you screaming off to the video shop.*

● The Narrator (or Observer of the Dance)



Tristram Proust (played by Sir Alec Olivier)

URBANE, witty, all-seeing, Proust observes his contemporaries with wry wit and witty wryness. Probably based on author Powell himself, with giveaway clues such as his Eton education, agreeable house in Somerset and his authorship of a long sequence of brilliant novels entitled 'Come Dancing'.

● The Power-Hungry Temptress

Lady Petronella Starborgling (played by Miranda-Natashason)

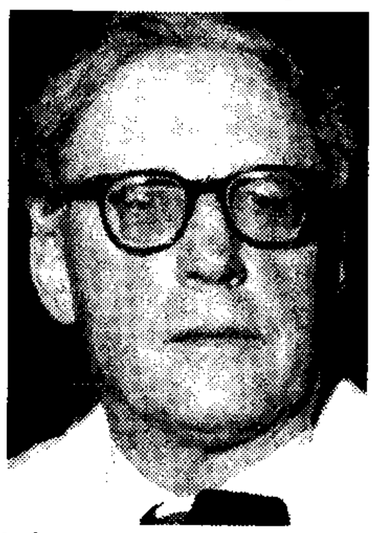
THIS society femme fatale devours men like a spider. No one is safe from her clutches. Probably based on a cross between Lady Diana Waugh and Lady Violet Dalrymple-Smythe.

● The Object of Ridicule

Captain Mainwaring (played by Arthur Lowe)

SELF-IMPORTANT, ambitious contemporary of Proust's at Eton, who after being bullied rose to become commander of the local Home Guard at Westminster-on-Sea. Probably based on George (later Lord Weidenfeld), the Hungarian-born publisher, or W.F. Deedes, the Tory Cabinet minister who later became Lord Deedes of the Telegraph.

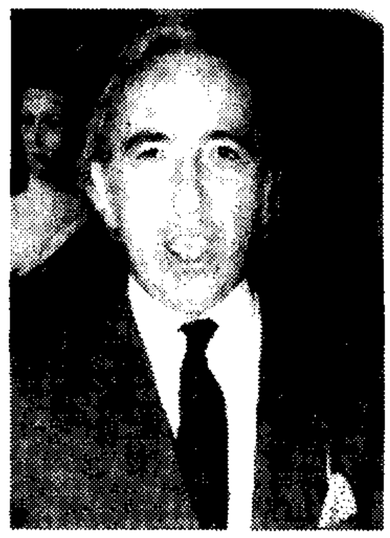
● Fuddy-Duddy Don



Peregrine Sillybilly (played by Arnold Bennett)

THIS high-table schemer is known for the legendary wit with which he has regaled successive Oxford generations for eighty years. An undergraduate once asked him, "Sir, do you know your trousers are on fire?" Sillybilly retorted, quick as a flash, "Of course. I was at Eton with him. He's one of the Gloucestershire Trousers-Are-On-Fire." Probably based on Sir Horace Borer, the legendary Master of Balliol, or possibly Reg Varney of On The Buses fame.

● Pretentious, Ex-Politician



Norman St John Stevas, later Lord Fawnsley (played by Donald Sinden, later Sir Donald Sinden).

ONE of Powell's least credible characters, St John Stevarse inhabits a snobbish fantasy world which bears no relation to reality. Probably based on Sir Roy Strange, a little-known mustachioed poseur of the period.

● French Restaurateur

Roman Fleuve (played by Gerard Depardieu)

THE owner of a little Chelsea bistro, frequented by many of the characters. Later he marries Andrea Wilson, a former nun-turned-atheist who mixes in London's highest social circles and *(That's enough Dance. Ed.)*

*Powell's "time-sequence" comprises the novels *Mrs Fothergill Comes To Tea* (1938), *Cocktails With Mrs Fothergill* (1941), *Mrs Fothergill Goes To War* (1944), *Lady Fothergill's Thé Dansant* (1946), *Lady Fothergill's Chinese Takeaway* (1959), *The Duchess of Fothergill Goes To Venice* (1964), *Inspector Fothergill Investigates* (1967), *That's Enough Books* (1969). Powell's autobiography in 7 volumes *Save The Last Dance For Me* was published between 1971 and 1987. His diaries *Ballroom Dancing In 12 Easy Lessons* were published in 14 volumes between 1984 and 1996.

Tupling admitted he had urinated on the woman in the sauna but denied raping her. "I am an officer, for God's sake — integrity and all that.

Daily Telegraph

Initially Signore Vivaldi toyed with a fifth seasonal concerto…

WHO SHOULD PLAY PRINCESS DI IN THAT NEW FILM?

WE AT the Daily Moron say that you, the people, should choose who you want to play your People's Princess in the Hollywood blockbuster that is coming to your local cinema soon — *One Wedding And A Funeral.*

It is only right and proper that the British people should have the final say when it comes to casting the most important movie role ever.

Should it be?

1. **Liz Hurley**
2. **Melinda Messenger**
3. **Ulrika Jonsson**
4. **Carol Vordemann**
5. **The Spice Girls**
6. **Jodi Foster**
7. **Sharon Stone**
8. **Madonna**
9. **Eddie Izzard**
10. **Peregrine Worsthorne**

Phone now on the Moron Royal Hotline 0800 62461. All calls free (38p a second).

A Doctor writes

AS A doctor I am often asked: "Will you go and interview the Princess of Wales on tape?".

The simple answer is "What's it worth?", though a more complex response might be: "I thought it was essential constitutionally that Diana's story should be brought into the public domain and her viewpoint given a fair hearing."

What happens is that the doctor goes to see the author for a regular cheque. Armed with his notes the doctor then buys a big house in the country.

This condition is known as Colthurst's Syndrome or *Medicus avaricius etoniensis*.

If you want to talk confidentially about your problems then consult a doctor at once and he will pass it on to Andrew Morton.

© A Doctor

Harry Enfield's **Bores** Drawn by **Michael Heath**

23. A Fresh Bore

(surely 'start'? Ed)

"Of course tremendous defeat no use denying it but time now to pick ourselves up off the floor um and move forward um new modern party get fully behind new young leader William's a marvellous little squit gets my support 100% um hard choices pull no punches make ourselves more appealing to the younger secretary I mean generation um forward looking positive vibrant young shadow cabinet like Michael Howard and John Redwood in tune with the kids reach out to the nation um a millennium new members by New Million um all pull together with one voice no time for recriminations against Clarke Heseltine and the other bastards who lost us the election…"

DIARY

(Applause. More Applause)

Elton John: Whoo! Yey! Thank you mother! Hey! Great! Great! Thanks guys! Thanks for giving me the clap — whoops! Ha ha!

(Audience laughter. Applause. More applause)

Elton John: Any quest-ee-o-nez? Anyone want to *draw me out*? Whoops! Put it back in, man! Oi! Oi! Ha! Ha!

(Laughter. Standing ovation)

Elton John: Do we have the Spice Girls here tonight? We do! Yey! Lovely surprise! Ginger Spice — Do you want to come down on me with a question — whoops!!? Ha! ha!

Ginger Spice: Elton, we all love your classic rock songs and we think you're a true Spice Boy, but —

(Cheers and applause)

Ginger Spice: — but what we'd like to know is, what was the most memla, the most, er, membub — er, what was it?

Posh Spice: Memrurboow.

Ginger Spice: That's the one. The most memrurboow night of your life, Elton?

Elton John: OOh-er! Pass the vaseline, mother!

(Laughter and applause)

Elton John: Seriously though, it was probably that time when John Lennon —

(Applause. Tears. Lights lowered. Standing ovation)

Elton John: Thanks. Great. That time when John Lennon came onstage with me and it just really was one of those truly great evenings and together we sang the song I'm gonna sing for your now, with great lyrics by Bernie, and like you say it was a truly memorable evening.

(Applause)

Elton John (sings): Ah kint explain,
woh noh, There's somethung abaaht the weeay Yoow luk tonaaaaght!

(Applause. More applause)

AN AUDIENCE WITH ELTON JOHN

Elton John: Woooh! Yey! Great! Thank YOU! Do we have Chris Evans in the audience? We do! Yey! Chrissie baby! Ladies and gentlemen, the great Chris Evans! Woooh!

(Applause. Laughter. More applause)

Chris Evans: Yes, Elt! Well, Elty baby!

(Laughter. Applause)

Elton John: How you doin, Chris? You can spin my CD any day — it's a whopper! Ha ha!

(More laughter. Applause)

Chris Evans: Elton, you've been a major star in this great industry on both sides of the Atlantic for twenty five years now. Looking back, I think what we'd all like to know is who is your totally fave current breakfast dee-jay?

Elton John: Chris — no one comes near you. Truly! And you've got a lovely arse, mate!

(Laughter. Applause)

Elton John: Seriously, I'd like to sing for you now a truly memorable song, which I remember truly from the days when I had true memories of myself as a lad, and, like everyone, singing along with it — and let me tell you, it was truly memorable. Abide With Me.

(Applause)

Elton John (sings): Abard wiv meey.
Yaba-ard wiv meeeeey
Yabaaard wiv meyeyeyeah
Ya-ba-AAAAARd weeEEev meeeeeyah.

(Tears. Applause. More applause)

Elton John: Do we have a question from Janet Street-Porter? Where are you? Ullo, luv!

(Applause. Laughter)

Janet Street-Porter: My oi ars yow summing personaw? Air big's haw cock, ven? Ar Ar Ar!

(Laughter. Huge applause)

Elton John: Hahaha! Great! Hahaha! Twice as big as your boobs, dear! Ha! ha! ha!

(Audience cries with laughter. Applause)

Elton John: Touche! Ha! ha! ha! Bollocks! Ha! Ha! Ha!

(More laughter, cheers)

Elton John: Seriously, though. Mister Graham Taylor! Graham?

Graham Taylor: Chiz, Elton. Elton, how come you such a great all-round bloke plus triffic sensafuma?

(Applause)

Elton John: Thanks, mate. Seriously though, I love everything about Watford, and all those great guys there cos they all so grounded, they just treat me as a todally ordinary bloke, which is what I am, they just treat me todally normal, like one of the family, like they say, hey, Elton, loved your last single, or hey, Elton, mate, your TV special was todally outasight, mate. No fawning, nothing, just straight up, one bloke to another. And I todally appreciate that, I really do.

(Applause)

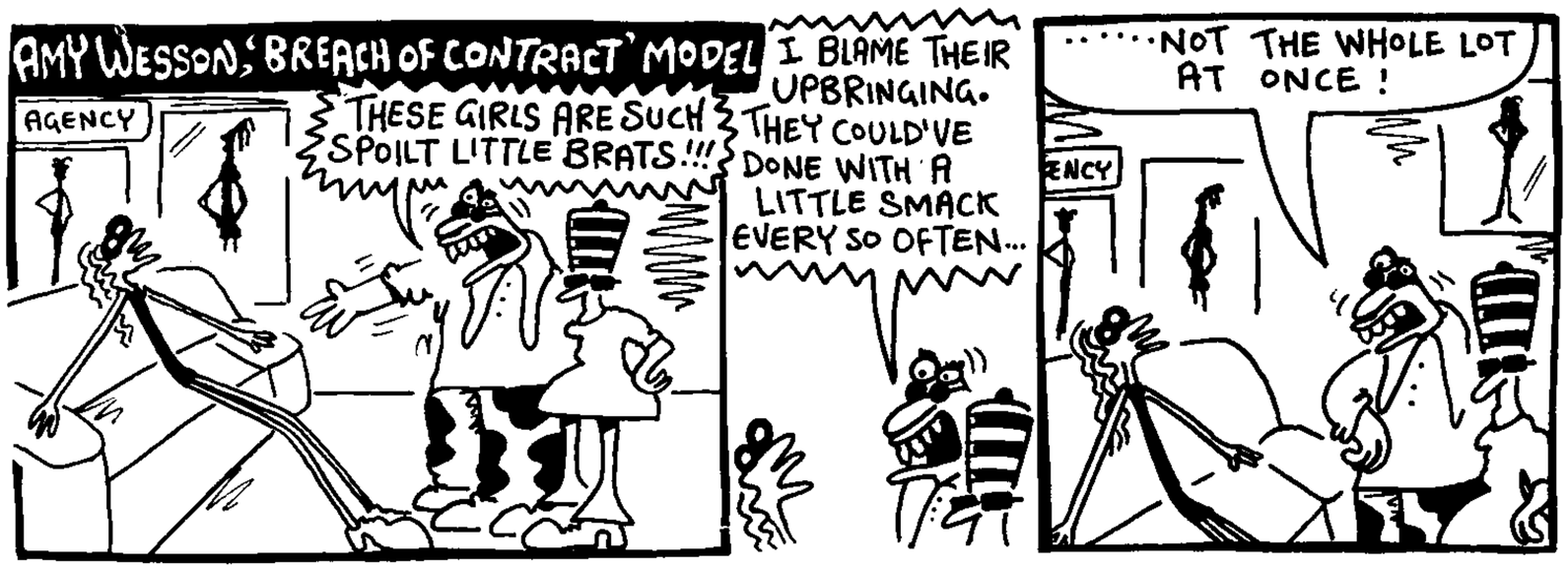
Elton John: And this is a song from my new album, Normal Bloke. *(sings)*:

Ler-er-erv is all we gard
I say, ler-er-erve is all we've gar-ar-ard
An if we gut ler-er-er-er-erve
Then ler-er-erv is all we gar-ar-ar
Ar-ar-ar-ar-ar-ar-ar-ar-ar-arrddd.

(The audience stands. Applause. Cheers. Catcalls. More applause. More cheers. More catcalls. Tears. Kisses. Waves. Hugs)

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


AMY WESSON, 'BREACH OF CONTRACT' MODEL
AGENCY
THESE GIRLS ARE SUCH SPOILT LITTLE BRATS!!!
I BLAME THEIR UPBRINGING. THEY COULD'VE DONE WITH A LITTLE SMACK EVERY SO OFTEN...
.....NOT THE WHOLE LOT AT ONCE!
ENCY

Drug abuse 'can be beaten by joint effort'

Gulf Daily News

Late afternoon DJ Kevin impressed boss Matthew Bannister when he sat in on the breakfast show for Mark 'n' Lard recently.

And when he was told the job was his, he had an usual reaction. "I was physically sick," he said.

Sun

Drugs fine for businessman

The Scotsman

Literary Review

Contract killings

A Certain Justice
P.D. James
(Faber, £15.99)

Unnatural Exposure
Patricia Cornwell
(Little Brown, £16.99)

THE Queen of Crime (UK) and the Queen of Crime (USA) both had new novels out last week. Fans of literary trivia may be interested to know that the American monarch published her first book as P.D. Cornwell (her full name is Patricia Daniels Cornwell), although it is not known whether this was deliberate homage to P.D. James.

Certainly, despite a three-decade gap in age, the writers have much in common. Both are explicitly religious — James is big in the Common Prayer Book Society, Cornwell once wrote a biography of Billy Graham's wife — and see the crime novel as a moral platform. God has been a big off-stage character in all James's recent books and is a crucial *deus ex machina* in *A Certain Justice*. Cornwell's novels frequently break off for homilies against drinking, smoking and fatty food and in favour of safe sex.

Only in their productivity do the women starkly differ, representing two distinct eras of publishing. James has produced 14 books in 35 years; Cornwell nine books in eight years. The English writer belongs to a time when a novelist appeared in print if they had an idea which they had managed to complete. The American author represents the new treadmill contracts, in which a hot new author is signed up to deliver a new hardback annually to coincide with the softcover release of the previous title.

The new books — although they will doubtless give pleasure to established fans — illustrate well the problems of the two authors' career plans. James has been overtaken by time; Cornwell by tiredness.

A Certain Justice is set among lawyers, suggesting that even the stately Baroness James of Holland Park fancies a piece of the Grisham action. The writer's eye for architecture remains exact but her talent for the macabre has become worryingly perfunctory. The first piece of mystery — the discovery of a dead defence counsel draped in a barrister's wig soaked in blood not her own — is astonishingly thrown away by the revelation within a few pages of an innocent reason for the presence of the other blood group.

But James's biggest problem is now dialogue. She can do the voices of her own caste — the elderly upper-middle-classes — but her ear for wider society is embarrassing. A London working class woman, appearing at the Old Bailey as a witness, refers to having visited "the occulist". A 21-year-old youth from the rough parts of Notting Hill speaks quaintly grammatical English. Presumably he's a closet member of the Common Prayer Book Society.

It's the same with lifestyle. The author seems to think that a happening place for young London people to go at night is "the carvery of the Strand Palace Hotel". These problems of characterisation are worsened by her decision to keep in the background a character she can still present effortlessly: Commander Adam Dalgleish. It's clear that James is bored with him but, like Conan Doyle with Holmes, she dare not get rid of him completely.

At least she only has to come back to Dalgleish every few years. In *Unnatural Exposure*, Patricia Cornwell returns to Dr Kay Scarpetta, chief medical examiner of the state of Virginia, for the eighth autumn in succession.

The millions who read Cornwell avidly presumably do so for the mortal detail. In the past — when people sewed their own shrouds or washed the bodies of their family dead — her books would not have been needed. But now she dramatises the secrets of the grave for a closed-coffin culture. She has diligently mugged up what happens under the skin and under the soil.

Cornwell can be an interesting writer. Recent novels contain an attempt to present a sympathetic lesbian character which most million-selling authors would regard as commercial suicide. The problem is that Cornwell's relentless contracts have stretched her ideas. This time, for a change, she starts off in Dublin, but Irish dialogue is beyond her (she keeps throwing in the word "bloody" and hoping). And Scarpetta, with her lifestyle homilies and perfect Italian cooking, is becoming a prig.

Both James and Cornwell have made disastrous attempts to ditch the form that made them famous: the former with the "serious" novel *The Children of Men*, the latter with the "comic" novel *Hornet's Nest*. But both remain trapped in the locked room of their popularity and, in their most recent books, go about their work with a dull duty.

"OK, so every month we choose a book, read it, then we meet up to discuss whether it should be burned"

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ IMPORTANT questions about Andrew Morton's ethics as a biographer are raised by his new book — the book in question being his study of Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi, due out next year.

This strange project has been largely ignored amid the fuss about Morton's betrayal of Princess Diana, though one newspaper last week did mention briefly that he was writing a "critical biography" of the veteran Kenyan despot. There is certainly plenty to criticise. Moi's henchmen have been responsible for dozens of political murders in recent years, and dissent from his rule is dealt with ruthlessly.

Anyone expecting Andrew Morton to expose this bullying tyrant may, however, be disappointed. The biography has been written with Moi's full cooperation, and in an article for the *Observer* two years ago Morton made it clear where his sympathies lay. Moi was "one the great survivors of African politics" whose image had been shamefully "distorted by the western media". His critics were motivated by "racism".

"This is not to say," Morton added, "that my biography of President Moi will be an exercise in vanity publishing any more than Jonathan Dimbleby's book on Prince Charles." Since Dimbleby's book was flattering to the point of adulation, we fear the worst.

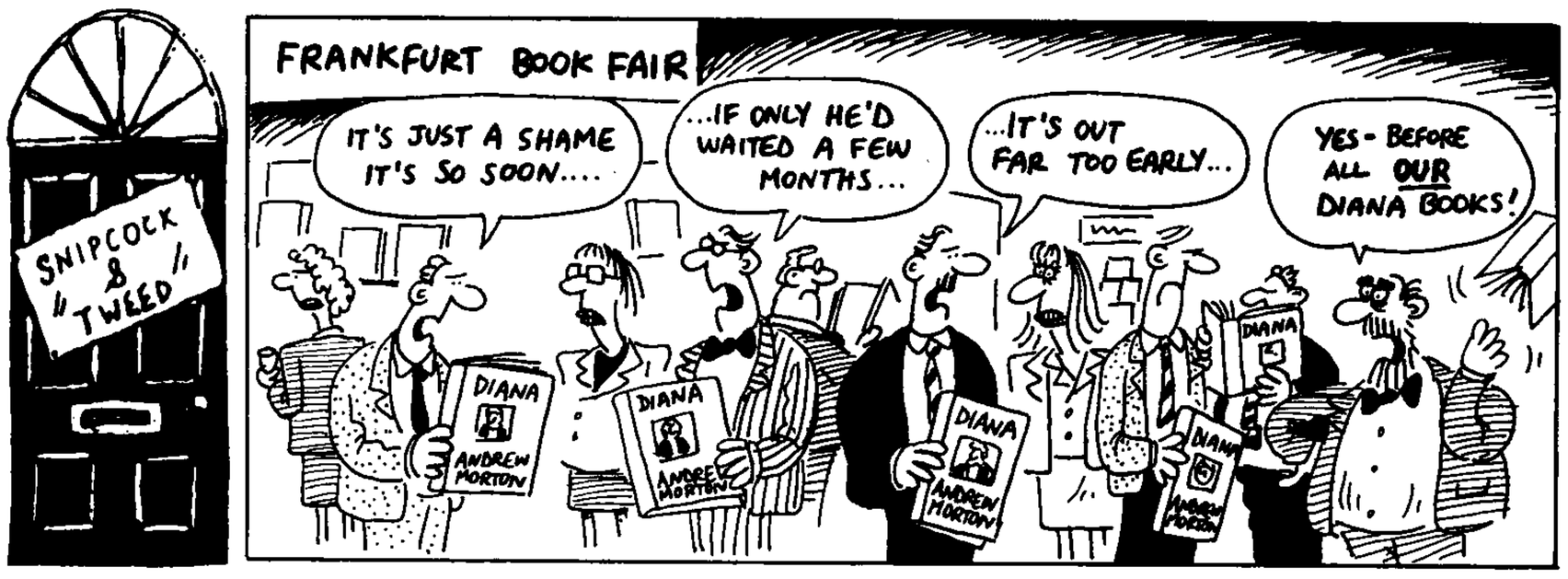
☐ *BOOKWORM had a couple of Booker Prize brainstorms in the last issue. His statement that Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood was not shortlisted for the Booker was accurate up to a point: Alias Grace is not on the shortlist this year. It was, however, in 1996. Whoops. Then he suggested that Independent literary editor Boyd Tonkin had accused Booker judge Jason Cowley of "feigning literary erudition". Bookworm should have realised that Boyd is far too gentlemanly to cast such aspersions. Friends have pointed out that "The Literator", the Indie's book gossip column, is not written by him, and that he did not even see this piece before publication. The snidery was the work of Liz Thomson of Publishing News — who, it seems, has not got over her rivalry with Cowley, who used to work on The Bookseller.*

■ WHY did Standard hackette Syrie Johnson make such a spiteful attack on Darian Leader's new book *Promises Lovers Make When It Gets Late*?

Writing in the *Literary Review* she cast aspersions on Leader's personal life and swooped on his suggestion that "a man will often call a woman late at night, as he lies alone in his room, but a woman is more likely to think of a man in this way in the morning, perhaps thinking about whether she will be included in his schedule".

Johnson dismissed this with a sneering "Hmmm". Could this be the same Syrie Johnson who profiled the fashionable shrink for the *Evening Standard* 18 months ago over a warm and friendly luncheon? Certainly Johnson's vitriol cannot be connected to the 4am phone-call that followed lunch with her suggestion of a nocturnal visit. Leader politely turned down her offer. But one question remains: is 4am late at night — or early in the morning? Hmmm.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR
IT'S JUST A SHAME IT'S SO SOON....
...IF ONLY HE'D WAITED A FEW MONTHS...
...IT'S OUT FAR TOO EARLY...
YES - BEFORE ALL OUR DIANA BOOKS!
DIANA
ANDREW MORTON

footnotes

RETURN OF THE BAGMEN

THE death from a heart attack of Derek Treadaway, who spent 15 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, must have come as something of a relief to the former West Midlands police officers who tortured him into a false confession.

Treadaway's conviction was overturned last November by the court of appeal after he won his assault case and £50,000 against four officers. The officer in charge of the torture, in which Mr Treadaway was handcuffed to a chair and half-suffocated by a plastic bag forced over his head, was John Brown, then a detective inspector, later promoted to superintendent (see *Eye* 919).

Brown left the police last December without being prosecuted or disciplined over the Treadaway case, which now seems closed. Mr Brown faces further problems, however, with the case of Keith Twitchell, who, a year before the Treadaway case, claimed that he had been tortured into a confession after being handcuffed to a chair and half-suffocated by a plastic bag forced over his head. "I lost consciousness," he tells the *Eye*. "When I came to, my left hand was still handcuffed to the chair. My right hand was freed so I could sign the confession statement. I didn't even read it. I would have signed anything."

The officer in charge of the inquiry in 1981 — two years before the Treadaway torture — was the same John Brown, then a detective sergeant. Brown's most vigorous assistant was the late DC John Perkins, who

TORTURED: Keith Twitchell

has recently become famous as the man who tricked and beat a confession to the Carl Bridgewater murder out of Patrick Molloy. Mr Twitchell recalls John Perkins's delight when the false confession was signed. "The good old bag — it always works!" he announced to his delighted colleagues.

Keith Twitchell spent 14½ years in prison for the armed robbery he didn't commit to which he "confessed" under the influence of the good old bag. He was refused leave to appeal against his conviction and the home office C3 department, true to form, decided not to refer the case to the court of appeal. When Derek Treadaway won his damages against Brown and Co, however, even the home office officials could spot the coincidences. The Twitchell case was reopened and is now being considered by the criminal cases review commission. Mr Twitchell's solicitors sent the case to Stephen Solley QC, who concluded in his report that the conviction could not possibly stand. If, as seems inevitable, Keith Twitchell is eventually cleared, former detective superintendent Brown and his force might find himself being sued once more.

MANAMARAMA!

New Labour — New Freebies

■ TWO parliamentary private secretaries to cabinet ministers have spent four days Bahrain at the expense of an organisation which supports the Bahraini dictatorship and has regularly made undeclared payments to an MP.

Dennis Turner MP, PPS to Clare Short, secretary of state for international development, and Ken Purchase MP, PPS to Robin Cook, foreign secretary, flew to Bahrain as guests of the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies. The third member of the "delegation" was David Wilshire, Tory MP for Spelthorne.

Eye readers *(No 918)* will recall the photographs of the generous £500 cheques paid each month by the GCSS to William Powell, then (now no longer) Tory MP for Corby, who did not declare them. Mr Powell then took on GCSS's Omar Al Hassan as researcher, thus ensuring for the first time in the history of the House that a researcher paid for his employer/MP. Omar Al Hassan was later thrown out of the Pugin room of the House by Emma Nicholson, who had to call two orderlies before the cigar-puffing sycophant agreed to leave. The GCSS's chief purpose is to suck up to the dictators of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

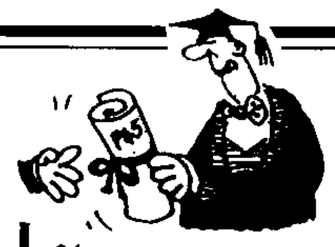
PPS PURCHASE

PPS TURNER

Interviewed on Bahraini TV, Dennis Turner praised the Shura council, a clique of toadies appointed by the Amir of Bahrain to replace the partly-elected parliament he dissolved in 1975. Without mentioning the recent resolution of the European Union (denouncing torture, imprisonment without trial, etc etc in Bahrain), Turner was quoted as saying that on the MPs' return they would alert the British government to the "false information which finds its way into the British press as a result of the activities of hostile groups". Perhaps he means the Bahraini opposition in exile, many of whose distinguished leaders support the Labour party and are about to be tried in their absence for treason in Manama.

Lord Avebury, chairman of the parliamentary human rights group, has written to Dennis Turner to point out the conflict between his quoted statements and his own foreign secretary's commitment "to spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy which we demand for ourselves". Avebury comments wrily: "We do not demand the Shura system for ourselves".

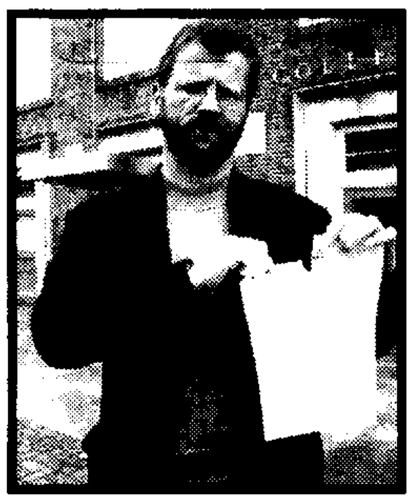
High Principals



The Mighty Quinn

■ THE recurring difficulties in further education colleges with the meaning of the word "voluntary" were on display recently at Carlisle College (principal: Julian Venables).

At the end of last term, 14 lecturers were presented with a new contract which they noticed was slightly different from their old one. Teaching hours were increased without extra pay from 756 to more than 900 a year; holidays were slashed; overtime payments abolished; Sunday and Saturday work (and unlimited teaching in the evening) made compulsory if required; and notice period reduced from 12 to four months. The lecturers were asked to sign the contracts "voluntarily". They had an absolutely free choice in the matter — but if they did not sign they would be sacked.



SACKED: James Quinn

With great reluctance, desperate to keep their jobs, 13 lecturers signed, adding the words "signed under duress". They were told that these words invalidated the contract and were ordered to sign again without adding anything. They complied, writing separate letters to the effect that they had signed under duress. When the college insisted that they sign yet another letter to say they had not signed under duress, the lecturers finally accepted their fate.

The fourteenth was James Quinn, a popular lecturer in English language and literature at the college for nine years, and the lecturers' union representative. He voluntarily refused to sign the new contract and was involuntarily sacked. He is on £49 a week benefit. His union, NATFHE, which he served loyally and without any reward for so long, is refusing to support his claim of unfair dismissal.

Mr Quinn appealed against his sacking to the board of governors. Three governors attended the appeal, which was dismissed: Stanley Rogers, a retired colonel; Stuart Turnbull, a director of a local packaging firm; and Jane Thompson, a restaurateur. These three were entirely representative of the rest of the board of governors which is chaired by Mr Michael Gilligan, a local garage proprietor and car dealer who does not encourage trade unions in his workplace.

Mr Gilligan is a director of a car hire company which supplies Carlisle College with its pool of cars. Other governors include a surveyor, an accountant, a finance director, a dentist, a priest, a bus director, a post office manager and a telephone manager. There are no trade union or staff representatives on the board.

COUNTER PAIN

THE Post Office is frightfully proud of "franchising" — closing down public crown post offices and opening them somewhere else under private "franchisees". A spokesman told the *Eye* that the franchises had provided a "wider choice of services". But not everyone agrees.

Many customers at the new franchised offices have to wait longer to be served by newly-recruited non-union staff who are paid much less than in the crown offices. In the summer of last year the Labour party announced that all franchises of crown offices would stop immediately a Labour government took office. There was a sudden stampede of applications for franchises. In the six months before the election, six crown offices in the London area were flogged off to franchisees: Queensway, Ealing, Chiswick, Kensington Church Street, Kings Cross and Watford. The Post Office described the suggestion that these franchises were rushed through before the election as "completely untrue".

In July, the manager of the newly-franchised office at Ealing, Mohan Berry, was suspended and his contract torn up after an audit discovered "serious accounting irregularities". Mr Berry is a key figure in recent post office franchising in London. His first "agency office" was at Newman Street, Marylebone, whose business he sold to Shahid Mahmud. Mr Mahmud was suspended on the same day as Mr Berry, and his contract terminated also on grounds of "accounting irregularities." After selling Newman Street, Mr Berry got the franchise for a new post office in Mayfair, replacing two crown offices in the area. He sold this on to Mr Steve Aggarwal, who is also the franchisee at the controversial office in Watford. Mr Berry went from Mayfair to Ealing where he so rapidly came unstuck.

The suspensions of Messrs Berry and Mahmud have led to sharp complaints from the Communication Workers Union about the lack of control in the franchised offices, which deal with vast sums of public money. The Post Office insists: "The financial supervision of franchised offices is as thorough and as strict as in crown offices directly run by Post Office Counters".

The Post Office does, however, concede that "during the summer an investigation began into the processes and procedures used to convert crown offices in the region to franchises". During that investigation, moreover, "a very small number of staff in the North Thames and East Anglia region have been suspended from duty purely as a precautionary measure".

The *Eye* named four senior managers and asked if they had been suspended or had resigned or retired since the investigation started: Mr Harvey Skipsey, head of the retail network in the North Thames and East Anglia region; Richard Sidlin, regional franchise manager; Katey Howell, Sidlin's assistant; and Tom Pegler, his deputy. Here is the reply: "I hope you will understand that we cannot discuss any details while an internal investigation continues. I therefore can't even confirm whether any of the names you put to me are involved in the investigation."

STONED? Bertolini

One very important person who publicly stepped down during the investigation is Mr Bert Bertolini, general manager for the whole region. In a letter to his staff on 4 August, he announced that "several control weaknesses... may have led to serious irregularities". He announced that he was handing over the regional manager's job to two of his deputies "in order to ensure impartiality and continuity". His absence is irritating the people of Watford who are expecting Mr Bertolini to fulfil an engagement which he promised them last December. Predicting that the newly franchised post office would be a triumph, he announced (*Watford Observer*, 20 December 1996): "I will stand in the middle of Watford and people can throw stones at me if it goes wrong." The franchised office at Watford has been lambasted on all sides. Eager crowds gather daily in the town centre with stones in their hands, hoping that Mr Bertolini will soon be back in his job so he can keep his promise.

Taylor's Tale: No Wyn situation

■ **ALISON TAYLOR, the former social worker who was so fiercely and inaccurately attacked by Andrew Moran, QC for North Wales police, at the outset of the North Wales child abuse inquiry (see *Eye* 918), has finally been able to put her side of the story.**

Mrs Taylor was deputy head at Ty'r Felin children's home in Bangor from 1976-80. From 1982 to 1986 she was in charge of a neighbouring home, Ty Newydd. During that time she saw and heard of so much awful child abuse in Gwynedd county homes that she decided to speak out.

She approached a Gwynedd councillor, who put her in touch with North Wales police. They conducted an inquiry. Nothing happened — until Mrs Taylor was sacked for daring to speak to the police about council matters. (Her claim for unfair dismissal was settled out of court when the council retracted her dismissal, and paid her a year's salary and enhanced pension rights.)

In 1986 and 1987 Mrs Taylor wrote long letters to the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, setting out her allegations in detail. "Many children," she wrote, "have told us of regular and persistent abuse at T'yr Felin." She concluded: "I beg you to take some action for the sake of the children in care and of those who will come into care in the future."

Thatcher's office shoved the letter on to the Welsh office, where the relevant minister was Alison Taylor's MP, Wyn Roberts. Roberts knows the area well. His brother is a circuit judge at Wrexham. His letters to Mrs Taylor in 1987 are a model for ministerial ostriches everywhere. "I am afraid the department cannot intervene in matters such as this" (14 Jan 1987); "ministers cannot intervene in local matters of this kind" (13 March 1987); "it is not for central government to intervene in the matters you raised in your letter" (9 April 1987); "I am sorry that I can be of no further assistance to you in this matter" (20 May 1987).

Nowhere did Mr Roberts address the detailed complaints about abuse in public homes in his area; nor did he seem even to realise that Mrs Taylor had approached the local council again and again, had carefully put her complaints to the police and had been illegally sacked for her pains. From then on, her letters were met with yet more bromide replies from a junior official, Stephen Gearing.

In 1988 she tried again. She wrote in even more dramatic terms to the secretary of state for health, Tony Newton. One boy at a children's home, she wrote, had run away to be with his family. On his return he was greeted by a member of staff who "started to beat him about the body with his fists and a cane which he kept in the office. The boy was knocked to the floor, after which the staff member stood over him, and told him to crawl towards him and to lick his feet. The beating continued until the boy complied."

The assailant on that occasion, she alleged, had been complained about countless times and held a powerful position in the county. Please could Mr Newton do something. Yes, he could. He could pass the letter on to the Welsh office which ordered an inspection of north Wales homes. The inspection was carried out without any reference to Alison Taylor or to the 1986 police inquiry. "The inspectors," wrote Wyn Roberts MP to Alison Taylor in July 1991, "did not find anything to substantiate your allegations."

Mrs Taylor did not give up. Her letters to ministers doubled in number and intensity. But it was not until late last year that the government finally conceded a public inquiry. Great panic prevailed in the Welsh office at the prospect of Alison Taylor's evidence: no secretary of state or minister emerges with any credit. When, in February 1995, Cardiff Labour MP Rhodri Morgan asked secretary of state John Redwood "on what date his department was first informed in writing by a child care officer of allegations relating to widespread child abuse at north Wales children's homes", Redwood replied: "June 1991". Just four years out. As revealed here, Mrs Taylor's first letter to Thatcher was passed to the Welsh office in January 1987.

THE EYES HAVE IT

■ **HAVE you heard the one about the policeman who didn't know the colour of his own eyes? His name is Police Sergeant John Clark, and he was a witness in a recent false imprisonment case against the police brought by Hopeton Sutton, a young black man from south London.**

Mr Sutton told the north London court that he had been threatened in a cell at Lewisham police station by a police officer with "bluish-greyish eyes", a scar on his chin and an onyx ring on his finger. The officer, said Mr Sutton, had sat next to him in his cell, rubbed a set of metal handcuffs into his face and warned: "If you move, I'll break your teeth". Mr Sutton was later cleared on all the charges brought against him.

When PS Clark went into the witness box, he wore an onyx ring, had a scar on his chin and clear blue eyes. He agreed he was the custody officer on the day Hopeton Sutton was in the cells, but denied any threatening behaviour. Asked the colour of his eyes he replied promptly: "Hazel". He was then invited to step down in front of the jury so that they could have a good look at his eyes. Soon afterwards the jury were asked whether they agreed that PS Clark had threatened Hopeton Sutton in the way the young man alleged. Their answer was unanimous. "Yes".

You can write to Paul Foot at 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 0171 287 3183

In the City

THOUSANDS of shareholders in Brent Walker will have the rest of this month to ponder why they either remained in or, more mysteriously, bought into the long bankrupt house that George built.

For while the banks that have kept Brent Walker on a £1.6bn life support system since 1990 can celebrate the £700m sale of its last major asset, bookmakers William Hill, there is nothing for shareholders to cheer. Instead they have been told their shares are worthless and will be delisted come the end of the month ahead of probable liquidation. To add insult to injury, they will not even get to vote on the William Hill sale to Nomura, even though such a vote would normally be required.

Shareholders can thank the paper tigers of the Stock Exchange for this final twist of the knife. For it appears that when confronted by Brent Walker's intention (backed by its bankers) not to seek approval from shareholders — and possibly expose the directors and bankers to public criticism of misinformation and self-interest — the Stock Exchange rolled over in front of the alternative threat of immediate liquidation.

Given that George Walker's one-time leisure and property empire is hopelessly bust, this might all seem somewhat academic but for an important point of principle. Since 1990 the Stock Exchange has continued to allow Brent Walker shares to be traded, even though there was never much hope of asset sales levelling the bank debt mountain to leave any residual value for shareholders.

This suited the banks, led by Standard Chartered and Lloyds, as the company remained out of administration (unlike another billionaire debtor Polly Peck) and so was available as a possible vehicle. The listing also gave an impression of life after death, which made a sale of the Brent Walker assets easier than the fire sale option.

While shareholders could buy and sell the shares, the banks were also able to sell large lumps of their debt to specialised traders. The value of that debt has risen sharply in recent months as the William Hill deal moved closer and the chances of a higher than expected repayment improved. The Nomura deal produced up to £300m more than was expected.

On what basis the Stock Exchange continued to allow Brent Walker to be listed remains unclear, other than it must have been at the company's request. But what justification was provided; and what benefit did this facility provide to shareholders who might otherwise have been locked in seven years ago other than an escape route? Once those who wanted to bail out and take their tax loss had done so, why was the listing of benefit to shareholders? Did the Stock Exchange, especially once the William Hill sale was mooted, confirm that shareholders and potential investors had all the information with which to decide whether to buy or sell — ie that there was unlikely to be any payout and liquidation was the preferred route once William Hill was sold? And as the listing continued, why was Brent Walker, having enjoyed this facility for seven years, able to ignore the requirement to obtain shareholders' approval — admittedly an empty gesture given the alternative — set out in the normal listing rules?

Amazingly, despite its bankrupt status Brent Walker has continued to be a popular "punt" among penny stock players. Blocks of from 25,000 to 100,000 shares have been regularly traded. The price this year has been as high as 2 ¾p and in the past even as far as 6p. It is now a highly nominal ¼p. The presumed hope of the buyers was probably that, once stripped of its debt, Brent Walker might return as a "shell" with valuable tax losses. Why else buy? The reality was that the banks were themselves using up the tax losses so these were much less than tipsters suggested. Most of the remainder seems to have gone as part of the William Hill deal.

But why did the Stock Exchange not intervene on the basis that there was a danger of a false market in these seemingly worthless shares? Presumably it took the *caveat emptor* approach. It further washed its hands of such questions by most if not all deals being done on an "execution-only" basis with brokers not allowed to give any advice as to whether or not Brent Walker was a good investment — which it most certainly was not as investors learned to their cost last week. So much for regulation and protection of the small shareholder.

Just how much the banks have finally lost — net of asset, debt and tax loss sales — remains to be seen. The banks' sensitivity on this point may well in part explain their objection to any shareholders' grilling at a meeting. So too may the question of the fees earned since 1990 by Brent Walker's advisers — a figure estimated at more than £50m — not to mention the bonus to be paid to Brent Walker's directors who are expected to share up to £14m. An amount which could have paid perhaps 1p a share to all shareholders. But then, that's capitalism for you.

ERNEST SAUNDERS and his crew of Guinness share supporters are engaged in a last ditch battle to prevent publication of the report by the Department of Timidity & Inaction into the Distillers affair — possibly on 1 December, the 11th anniversary of the inspectors' appointment.

Trade secretary Margaret Beckett has rejected the siren voices coming from Blair business groupies and influential friends of those likely to be named in the report, and decided to publish after one more round of lobbying.

Why allow this special pleading when the moving finger has already written is a mystery. All that would ever satisfy Saunders & Co would be a ban on publication. Talk of appeals to the European court and the English court of appeal are just a smokescreen to protect the guilty and their City helpers who escaped the courts, thus allowing them to revive their business careers, claim compensation or prevent their City reputations and hopes of Labour advancement being tarnished. Hopefully Beckett's decision to publish will not be reversed by the pleas of those who for years helped fund the Tories.

Meanwhile the increasingly bitter spat between Deadly Ernest and his erstwhile patron David Elias threatens to reveal telling insights into how "Alzheimer" manipulated public opinion in his favour while protesting his innocence.

Earlier this month Elias wrote to lawyers D.J. Freeman representing Harpur-Gelco Holdings where

The Dow Jones parrot

he was once the major shareholder and his ex-ally Saunders is chairman. In the letter Elias declared: "While Ernest was employed as a consultant by Richbell [Elias' Richbell Group] I funded a special unit of Richbell employees to create positive propaganda on his behal... Indeed, even now you are using a letter concerning the Alzheimer's issue which was drafted by one of my employees. Furthermore, Ernest was always indiscreet on the subject of the Guinness affair. By way of example, on numerous occasions he remarked in front of me and a number of my colleagues, 'Jacob [Rothschild] owes me one — I made him a lot of money', and showed me the relevant page of the draft of the DTI report, and then told me the circumstances behind that remark."

What can Elias mean? Surely not a reference to the claim — always strenuously denied — that the now Lord Rothschild helped the Guinness share price along by buying eight million shares via Saunders' brokers Cazenove? Doubtless the noble lord will be as eager as that other great patron of the arts and property Elliott Bernerd to see the full story published at last.

THE Prudential may have missed its first deadline for compensating 90 percent of its 69,000 top priority victims of pension mis-selling (unlike four other companies), but somehow still continues to be overlooked for naming and shaming by treasury minister Helen Liddell.

This is a fact for which Labour government adviser Peter Davis, "the man from the Pru", continues to be very grateful. If only because it continues to allow him to appear on tempting TV commercials extolling the virtues of letting the Pru make your retirement dreams come true. But then Helen Liddell loyally served that other fat pension pillager, Robert Maxwell. Pass the sick bag!

IN JULY 1996 John Coles resigned as chief executive of the European operations of Australian group Mayne Nickless. This followed big losses at its logistics subsidiaries in Holland and Belgium caused by problems with their automated warehouses. The companies were expected to lose some £6m for 1996.

In September 1996 John Coles joined the business services group Hays as an executive director. In August 1997 Hays paid £72m to buy the Benelux business and a larger French logistics company from Mayne Nickless.

Clearly Hays has just the right man to make these businesses a success. Especially as the deal excludes the troubled automated warehouses.

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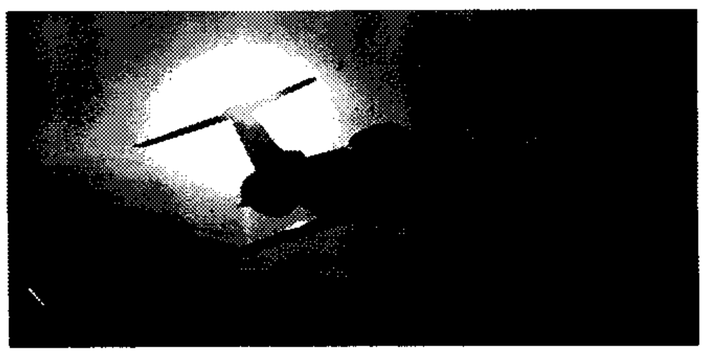

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YOUNG GRADUATE, 5'11", attractive, intelligent, seeks mature lady for discreet fun and frolics. London/Home Counties. Box 1135.

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GORGEOUS, GREGARIOUS brunette (30s). Writer and lecturer. Seeks thoughtful hunk to share dreams, love and the odd glass of champagne. Photo appreciated. Box 3235.

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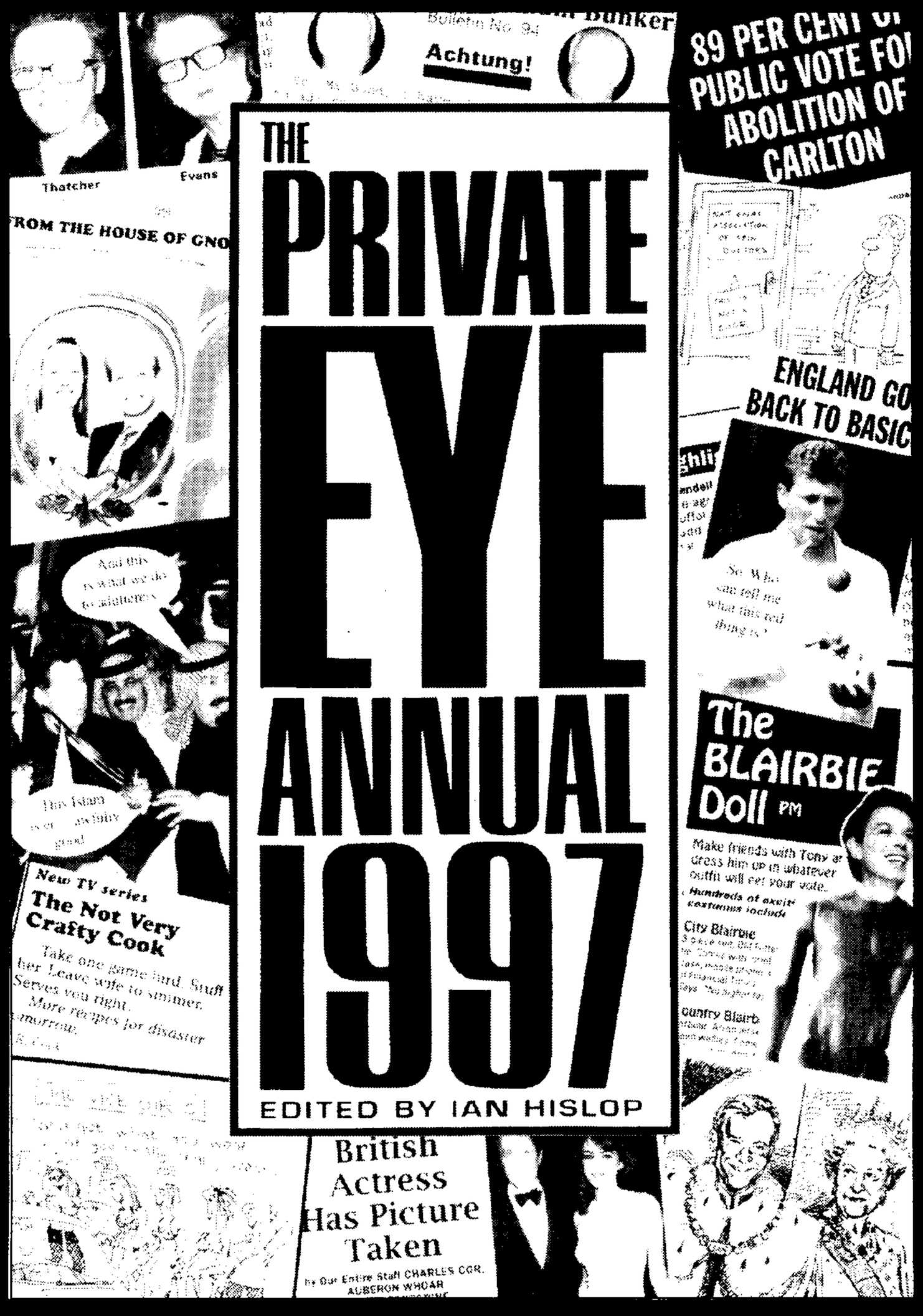

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